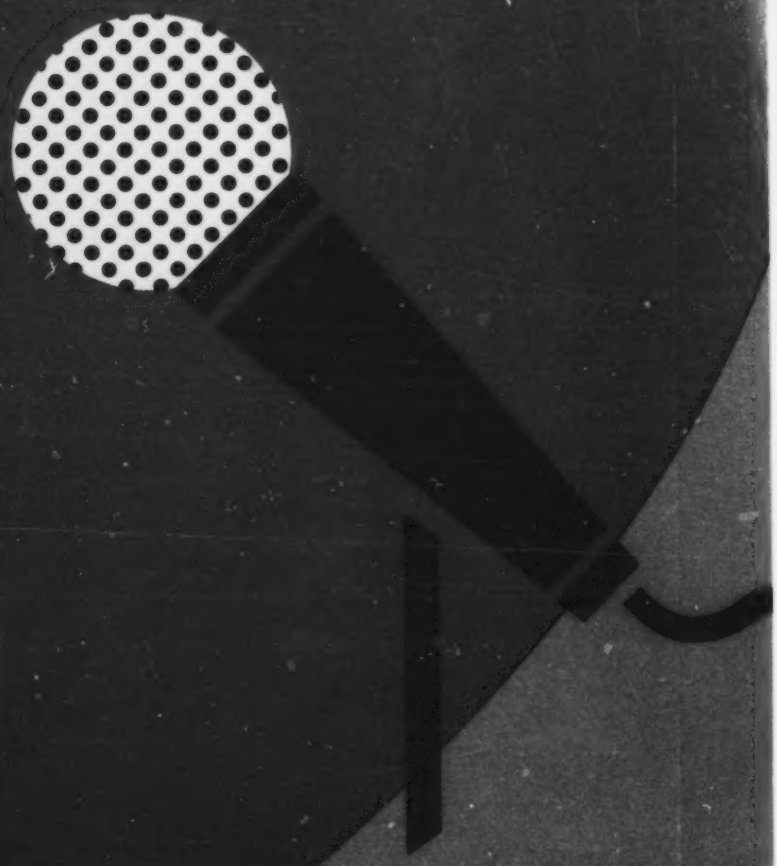
THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN



UNITED NATIONS

NOTES FOR SPEAKERS

The Advancement of Women

Notes for Speakers

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION
UNITED NATIONS

Note

This edition of ***Notes for Speakers*** *on* ***The Advancement of Women*** *is not an official document and is intended for information purposes only. The information it contains is drawn from publicly available sources and is accurate as of January 1995.*

In view of rapid developments, users of this publication are encouraged to seek more up-to-date information. Speakers are also invited to supplement the information in this edition with anecdotes, facts and other illustrative material drawn from local sources such as news media, citizens' groups, government offices, personal experience and contacts.

Notes for Speakers*, it should be emphasized, is not a collection of finished speeches but rather a starting point for speakers, including UN and government officials, academics, media and NGO representatives, to use in tailoring presentations suited to their own needs and circumstances.*

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Foreword

As we approach the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing, in September 1995, the momentum for women's issues is unmistakable. Taken as a whole, progress towards the advancement of women over the past two decades has been evident at local, national and international levels in all regions of the world. The importance of equality for women is no longer in question. The challenge is to ensure that all development policies and programmes contribute to equality. The pay-offs to society as a whole of doing so are now well documented.

The preparatory process for the Conference in Beijing has been inclusive, involving the United Nations system, national committees, parliamentarians, expert groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious leaders and youth.

NGOs have mobilized at all levels, conducting fora, forming new networks, engaging in dialogue with Governments and contributing to the shaping of the regional platforms and the global draft Platform for Action. The voices of countless women who otherwise would not have been heard have contributed to the preparatory process, maintaining the tradition of women at all levels participating in the global movement for women's equality.

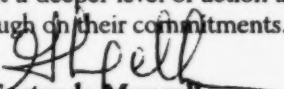
The Conference is the culmination of a continuum of United Nations conferences which, combined with the energy of national women's movements, have galvanized understanding, interest and action concerning the advancement of women around the world. These UN conferences and summits on education, children, the environment, human rights, population and social development have reflected a common concern regarding the role of women in development and society. They have built on the three previous UN world conferences on women in articulating the pivotal role and interests of women. The attention to women has been in part the result of the energetic and strategic input of women's NGOs worldwide. The results of these events confirm that human rights, including women's rights, transcend borders of geography and language as well as borders of religion and culture.

These conferences also demonstrate that what have been labelled "women's issues" are now universally recognized as issues of importance to all. Nations now see that it is imperative to address the gender dimension in finding solutions to problems that face the world today. Through global consensus fostered by the United Nations, I believe every nation has progressed further than it would have done by itself.

Finally, these conferences affirm the need for new relationships: equal partnerships between citizens and Governments, among the world's peoples, and between women and men. More than ever before, it is clear that partnership and dialogue are essential for the creation of a developed, peaceful world based on the principles of equality and justice.

The aim of the Fourth World Conference in Beijing is to capitalize on the resourcefulness of women, to share it and to act on it. The Conference on Women therefore will be an opportunity for Governments to commit themselves to specific actions. The parallel NGO Forum provides an opportunity for NGOs to not only propose solutions to the problems faced by women, but also present women's visions for solving the world's problems.

The Fourth World Conference on Women must elicit commitments to action, and to resources. This is the mission in Beijing; not further analysis, but a deeper level of action as well as the mobilization of political will of Governments to follow through on their commitments.



Gertrude Mongella
Secretary-General
Fourth World Conference on Women

Introduction

I am pleased to present this edition of ***Notes for Speakers*** on ***The Advancement of Women***, which provides an overview of the situation of women around the world and the multi-faceted efforts under way to attain equality with men.

This edition also highlights the theme of the advancement of women that has been a focus of the work of the United Nations since its founding 50 years ago. The UN has been a staunch ally in the struggle to attain universal women's rights and, more recently, has taken determined steps to fully integrate women into the decision-making processes of development policies and programmes worldwide. In addition, steps have been taken to ensure the advancement of women in the work of the Organization itself.

Our pressing global problems challenge our traditional ways of dealing with many issues, in particular the advancement of women. The key mandates of the UN Charter — the promotion of peace and security, human rights and economic and social development — all remain as valid and relevant as they did 50 years ago. But strategies to achieve these goals require innovative approaches and, in many cases, profound shifts in attitudes that will foster greater participation, tolerance and understanding in a rapidly changing world.

Despite disturbing setbacks and slow progress in some areas, we must not underestimate the important advances that have been made in the status of women. In addition to concrete economic, social and political gains that are noted in the pages that follow, there is good reason to be optimistic that the advances will continue at an accelerating pace. We can also find inspiration and confidence in heightened levels of awareness that serve to propel further advances by women around the world.

Increasingly, we understand that progress has been slowed by discrimination against women in all societies. The goals of peace, security, development and human rights are closely interrelated and require everyone's participation. The world can no longer afford to hinder the creativity and the energy of fully half of humanity in solving our problems and building a more secure world.

The advancement of women is a central theme reflected in the ongoing cycle of major world conferences that aim to revitalize international efforts for social development. These conferences are mapping out areas for joint action on key problems in the years to come.

The World Summit on Children, New York, 1990; the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992; the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993; the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994; the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995; the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995; and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 1996 all seek global agreement on concrete actions that must be taken to ensure the advancement and full participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

It is the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that serves as the frame of reference for much of the material that is contained in this edition of ***Notes for Speakers***. I am confident that it will be helpful to those of you who are writing and speaking about the United Nations and its efforts for the advancement of women throughout this anniversary period.

Samir Sanbar
Assistant Secretary-General
for Public Information

Chapter Summaries

These ***Notes for Speakers*** on ***The Advancement of Women*** are just that — notes. In the past quarter-century, an entire literature has emerged on the rights of women, on women's movements, and on the many official and unofficial efforts worldwide to advance women's rights at all levels of society. As the United Nations prepares for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September 1995, these Notes for Speakers present a brief digest of essential facts, a compendium of basic information and handy quotations that will remain relevant beyond the Conference itself.

In preparing for the World Conference, these notes will be useful to any interested persons — representatives of the United Nations, Governments, media, non-governmental organizations and academia — wishing to familiarize themselves, their audiences or constituencies on the status of women and the UN's role in supporting their advancement.

Chapter One provides an overview. Here is a brief summary of the emergence of women into public life over the past fifty years, especially the two decades since the First World Conference on Women in 1975. It discusses the legacy of centuries of discrimination against women, and obstacles to efforts to redress this history. It summarizes the endeavours by the United Nations system in projecting women's rights as human rights. Finally, it discusses the movement for women's rights in equal partnership with men within the context of the global trend toward democratization, as well as the vital role of national women's movements in fostering development.

Chapter One also includes companion articles featuring: 1) essential UN milestones in the advancement of women, from its founding in 1945 through the 1995 World Conference in Beijing; 2) notes on achievements of previous World Conferences and other UN events promoting women's rights and equality; and 3) the areas of concern of the Programme of Action that will emerge from the Beijing meeting.

Chapter Two, on women and work, looks at their positions — both as unpaid household labourers and as paid workers. Among the issues looked at are barriers to achieving equality with men; forces propelling women into the world of paid work; wage and unemployment differentials between the sexes; the emergence of women as owners and managers of enterprises; a regional survey of women in agriculture; forms of exploitation such as child labour and migrant labour; attempts to organize the female workforce; the impact on women of "structural adjustment programmes"; and the feminization of poverty and strategies for its reduction.

Chapter Three addresses the question of women and health. It discusses health indices within the context of women's life cycle; the problems faced by the girlchild, such as early weaning and nutritional deficiencies; the problems posed by teenage pregnancy, whose burden and responsibility invariably fall on the mother and rarely on the father; reproductive rights and family planning; the effects of the AIDS crisis; special problems of aging for women; and the health consequences of violence against women.

Chapter Four deals with women and education. It provides data regarding women who represent two-thirds of the world's one billion illiterates. It discusses education as a human right and UN measures to achieve universal education. The gender gap and attempts to redress illiteracy are charted region by region. Also examined are efforts to teach parents

about early learning and education opportunities for their daughters. Among the varied approaches covered in this chapter are: flexible school schedules, single-sex schools, affirmative action, women's studies programmes, recruiting female teachers and overcoming male-imposed stereotypes.

Chapter Five surveys the problems of violence against women. The responsibility of Governments to combat these violations of fundamental human rights is examined. Assaults on women, pandemic in frequency but often ignored, are reviewed in their many forms — domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, gender selective abortion, female infanticide, slavery and trafficking in women, prostitution and the condition of women in conflict situations.

Chapter Six assesses where women stand today in achieving positions of power and influence — in their homes, communities, economies and Governments. It reviews the emergence of women as a political force on national and international levels, region by region. It identifies remaining barriers and strategies to address inequities, such as affirmative action programmes. It also looks at women in the media and the private sector of the economy and in the community as agents of change and influence.

This chapter also includes a companion article listing women who have become heads of State and Government.

At the end of ***Notes for Speakers*** are appendices which include a bibliography of essential UN publications on women, audio-visual materials related to women, and suggestions for effective public speaking.

UN MILESTONES IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

1945 The Preamble to the United Nations Charter reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights ... in the equal rights of men and women." During the first General Assembly, held in San Francisco, female delegates demanded special attention for women's issues. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established a Sub-Commission of the Commission on Human Rights on the Status of Women.

1946 The United Nations Sub-Commission on the Status of Women becomes a full Commission. Its mandate is to promote women's political, economic and social rights. A Division for the Advancement of Women is set up in the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the same Division that is now acting as the Conference Secretariat for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

1948 The Universal Declaration on Human Rights opposes discrimination against women in Article 2: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex ..."

1949 The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others is adopted by the General Assembly.

1951 The International Labour Organization (ILO) adopts the Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value.

1952 The International Convention on the Political Rights of Women is the first global endorsement of equal political rights under the law, including the right to vote. It is the first United Nations instrument in which states parties undertook legal obligations involving the principle of equal rights between women and men.

1954 The UN General Assembly recognizes that women are "subject to ancient laws, customs and practices" inconsistent with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and calls on governments to abolish them.

1955 The International Labour Organization issues a Convention on Maternity Protection.

1957 The Convention on the Nationality of Married Women is adopted, granting women the right to retain or change their nationalities regardless of their husbands' actions.

1960 The ILO Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect to Employment and Occupation is adopted. UNESCO adopts the Convention against Discrimination in Education.

1962 The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages is adopted to ensure, by national legislation, equal rights for both spouses.

1963 The UN General Assembly recognizes the dimensions of violations of women's rights and calls for a Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

1966 The UN Commission on the Status of Women submits the first draft of the anti-discrimination Declaration. The General Assembly adopts the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (and the Protocol on the Abolition of Capital Punishment) as well as the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which calls for increased participation of women in public life, equal pay for equal work and the right to promotion.

1967 The General Assembly adopts the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women "to ensure the universal recognition, in law and in fact, of the principle of equality of men and women".

1968 The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations initiates a reporting system on implementation of the provisions for the Declaration by governments.

1970 The General Assembly adopts its first resolution urging equal employment opportunities for women in the United Nations Secretariat.

1975 International Women's Year is celebrated throughout the world with events at the local, regional and international levels. Activities promote recognition of women's contributions to society and equal rights. The First World Conference on Women is held in Mexico City. The final Plan of Action calls for the preparation and adoption of an international convention against all forms of sex discrimination and recommends procedures for its implementation. The General Assembly proclaims the first Decade for Women: Equality, Development, Peace. The United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) officially paves the way for a wide range of actions to improve women's status.

1976 The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Women is established to make financial resources available to further development projects aimed at women in developing countries. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), based in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, is also established by the General Assembly with a mandate to support the fuller participation of women in the economic, social and political spheres.

1979 The General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which defines discrimination against women as any distinction made on the basis of sex which impairs women's equal enjoyment of fundamental rights.

1980 The Second World Conference on Women is held in Copenhagen to review progress made in the first half of the Decade on Women. It adopts a Programme of Action.

1981 CEDAW enters into force with the required ratification by 20 countries.

1985 The Third World Conference on Women is held in Nairobi, Kenya, at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies call for increased participation of women as equal partners with men in all political, social and economic fields, including their full access to education and training.

The United Nations Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women becomes a permanent and autonomous organization in association with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and is renamed the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It funds innovative development activities to benefit women, especially in rural areas of developing countries.

1986 First World Survey on the Role of Women in Development is published by the UN.

1988 The Branch for the Advancement of Women is raised to the status of a Division, becoming the central UN unit on women's issues. WISTAT, the United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistics database, becomes operational as the focal point for the compilation of worldwide statistics on women.

1990 The Commission on the Status of Women reviews implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies and recommends convening the Fourth World Conference on Women.

1990-1995 The System-wide Medium-term Plan for Women and Development adopted by the Economic and Social Council in 1988 begins. It identifies ways for promoting the advancement of women both within the UN system and through the work of the various agencies and offices of the UN system.

1991 *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics* is published, a compilation of data on the situation of women throughout the world.

1993 The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women is adopted by the General Assembly. It defines "violence against women" as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

1994 The Commission on Human Rights decides to appoint a Special Rapporteur on violence against women. The Special Rapporteur will seek and receive information on violence against women, its causes and consequences from Governments, treaty bodies, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and other bodies and recommend measures to eliminate violence against women.

1995 The Fourth World Conference on Women, scheduled for September in Beijing, will review and debate 12 critical areas of concern and adopt a Platform for Action. The UN celebrates its Fiftieth Anniversary with events throughout the year to highlight its achievements, including its contribution to the global women's movement.

1996-2000 A Second System-Wide Medium-Term Plan for Women and Development is in the pipeline. The plan will outline further ways of strengthening the work of the UN for women's equality, including its own hiring practices, policies and programmes.

FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN, Beijing, September 1995

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, September 1995, expects to set targets that go beyond basic needs to meet "strategic gender needs," focusing on women's full participation in economic and political decision-making, examining inequality between the sexes as a human-rights issue, and intensifying international efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

The Conference will formulate a Platform for Action that reflects 12 main areas of concern. These areas are:

1 The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;

2 Unequal access to and inadequate educational opportunities;

3 Inequalities in health status, and unequal access to and inadequate health-care services;

4 Violence against women;

5 Effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women;

6 Inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the production process itself;

7 Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;

8 Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women;

9 Lack of awareness of, and commitment to, internationally and nationally recognized women's human rights;

10 Insufficient mobilization of mass media to promote women's positive contribution to society;

11 Lack of adequate recognition and support for women's contribution to managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment;

12 The girl child.

one

The Advancement of Women: An Overview

The struggle for women's rights, and the task of creating a new United Nations, able to promote peace and the values which nurture and sustain it, are one and the same. Today — more than ever — the cause of women is the cause of all humanity.

— Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali,
message for International Women's Day, 8 March 1993

In a century punctuated by unprecedented change, revolution and innovation, perhaps the most pervasive and lasting transformation has been the emergence of women as a major presence and force in public life the world over.

Women are assuming positions of influence in steadily accelerating numbers in our communities, schools, workplaces, governments, media, and in virtually every long-held bastion of male privilege and power.

This transformation, albeit erratic and uneven, is the result of the complex interaction of human development. The improved status of women could not have occurred on the present scale without the ceaseless work of hundreds of millions of women — and men — to overcome women's second-class status, powerlessness, marginalization and indignity.

Women have always contributed to all areas of economic and social life — as farmers, entrepreneurs, traders, workers, home-makers and mothers. Yet women share unequally in the fruits of their labour because of persistent discrimination. They constitute a majority of the world's poor and continue to suffer disadvantages in education, health and employment.

The emergence of women into the public arena from the circumscribed world of the home and family has essentially been a battle for human rights — the essential values that promote the fullest development of individuals and societies. Moreover, the struggle for equal status with men and full participation in society has also led to the recognition of broader rights of women as wives, mothers, daughters and as home-makers.

Long-standing forms of discrimination — from certain divorce laws to physical abuse — are no longer considered private matters. The right to family-planning methods, education and other family-related services are increasingly considered to be as important as the right to vote or hold a job.

And while women have advanced more rapidly in some societies than others, almost everywhere women's concerns are still accorded second priority, and women continually face discrimination, both subtle and flagrant.

Even in areas where progress has been achieved, there is fear today of a backlash that may reverse the gains that women have so painstakingly accumulated. Civil, religious and ethnic strife, underdevelopment and economic reversals are continuing threats to women's advancement.

The struggle for women's rights — reflecting an ever-deepening interplay between individuals, national women's movements and the international women's movement — has found a staunch ally in the United Nations over the past fifty years.

The expanding influence of the women's movement since the **first world conference on women** in 1975 is especially encouraging. Under UN auspices, the advancement of women has received sustained attention and review, ensuring that women's issues remain on the international agenda until effective action is taken.

Today, the enormous diversity of women around the world and even within any given society is better appreciated, a sensitivity that has been enhanced by the international meetings among women's advocates within the UN, among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Governments.

The need to forge an equal partnership with men continues to gain support and is a central theme of the **Fourth World Conference on Women**, to be held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995. Consensus is growing that:

- Overcoming discrimination is intrinsically linked with the issue of power;
- Women will remain second-class citizens in the absence of access to the economic, political and social resources and levels of decision-making enjoyed by men;
- Women are central to development, particularly in developing regions; the wider objectives of human development and peace cannot be achieved without eliminating discrimination against women.

An important step in reversing past inequalities is recognition by policy-makers that their decisions affect women and men differently. Introducing gender analysis into policies on development, the environment, nutrition and health will accentuate the impact of these policies.

Women must be engaged at all levels in efforts to eradicate poverty, promote peace and achieve sustainable development. Female perspectives are crucial to understanding the full dimensions of human society and facilitating constructive change.

AN EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

> *Women will change the world when they lead it, but they will change it with men as their partners.*
>
> — Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women

Proponents of women's rights increasingly see a partnership between men and women based on equality as a crucial way to foster development, overcome discrimination and construct more prosperous, equitable and harmonious societies. Such a partnership implies mutual respect for the inalienable rights to the same privileges, responsibilities and opportunities.

There is increasing consensus that for true equality to take root, profound revisions are required in the roles of both men and women.

No fundamental change in favour of women is possible without a massive change in male attitudes. This is more than a philosophical point: men control the legal, administrative and financial systems which effectively deny a vast number of women the right to own land, inherit property, establish credit, enter the professions or rise in business.

— Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund

A majority of UN Member States recognize international agreements, such as the **1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, that promote equality between the sexes and women's rights. Support for legislation against discrimination continues to increase worldwide. However, there remains a serious gap between *de jure* and de facto recognition of women's rights. Women often do not enjoy the rights, protections and freedoms guaranteed to them by law.

Discrimination against women will not be abolished by modifying laws alone. Lasting progress requires the commitment by the State and civil society to truly implement the law.

- The attainment of an equal partnership will depend on the legal and financial commitment of societies to the advancement of women. Little doubt remains that investing in women's health, education and work skills is perhaps the most rewarding contribution that society can make. Initiatives that improve women's status pay large returns in terms of family well-being, social integration, economic growth and quality of life.
- Research demonstrates that countries that targeted, for example, women's education and health early in their development, have become the most successful economically. Investment by society in women offers a high rate of return. [1]
- "Gender blindness", or ignoring the special needs and roles of women, is now recognized as a serious obstacle to meeting the wider targets of development programmes.

Persistent sex stereotypes at home, in school, on the job and in virtually all social institutions, slow efforts to broaden perceptions of both men and women's roles in society.

- Studies show that girls' educational and occupational choices are influenced by stereotypes of women promoted by their families, communities, schools, religious institutions, mass media and advertising.
- Boys are equally vulnerable to internalizing notions about their dominant place at home and in society, often adopting attitudes that hinder the realization of their potential as husbands, fathers and colleagues.

Given the breadth of the objective, much more needs to be done to eliminate discriminatory practices and encourage men and women to share equally the responsibilities and rights in the family and society at large.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status ...

— Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2

Establishing universal agreement on a body of human rights standards and principles is one of the UN's greatest achievements. Internationally, equal rights for women are being viewed as fundamental human rights.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (see: UN Milestones in the Advancement of Women, page viii), which covers measures to be taken by States to eliminate discrimination against women, obliges States to:

- Pursue a policy of eliminating discrimination against women by all appropriate means and without delay;
- Reaffirm the equality of human rights for women in society and the family;
- Take action against the social causes of women's inequality;
- Remove laws, stereotypes, practices and prejudices that impair women's well-being.

Since the UN General Assembly adopted CEDAW in 1979, 139 countries have ratified its provisions. However, 29 ratifying States have issued substantive reservations concerning some articles.

The **World Conference on Human Rights** in Vienna in 1993 further reaffirmed that "the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights."

WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

In tandem with women's movements around the world, the United Nations and its family of organizations are placing greater emphasis on initiatives that propel women into all levels of decision-making.

Women must enter the halls of power — in government bodies, political parties, labour unions and community organizations — in order to make known their preferences, concerns and interests.

Locally, strategies must encompass women's practical needs and cultural values to ensure that their political participation becomes a reality.

There is growing pressure on Governments to secure the effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the national, state and local levels by adopting appropriate laws and administrative measures.

However, most countries are far from achieving the target of 30 per cent women in decision-making levels by 1995 as set by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. A level of at least 30 to 35 per cent in decision-making bodies is generally considered the "critical mass" necessary for qualitative change in a decision-making body. [2]

Few women reach top levels of political participation and even fewer reach major decision-making positions. This, despite the facts that:

- Most countries now democratically elect political leaders;
- Women make up at least half the electorate.

Women are increasingly being elected heads of State, notably in developing countries. Channels currently available for raising awareness about women's political rights include formal and informal education, political education, NGOs, trade unions, the media and business orga-

nizations. Governments can lead the way, but all sectors of society must work together actively to bring about the advancement of women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

For millions of women, acts of violence are a part of everyday life and a denial of the rights to "life, liberty and security of person." (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3)

Popular attitudes towards violence against women are undergoing profound changes. The issue has risen to the top of UN conference agendas. Increasingly, violence against women is no longer considered a family affair or tacitly condoned. But the incidence of violence persists and may be on the rise, afflicting all regions of the world, in all economic and educational strata.

The growing concern about violence against women was highlighted at the World Conference on Human Rights. The Conference called for the "elimination of violence against women in public and private life" and identified full human rights for women as a priority for Governments and the United Nations. This includes action against:

- "All forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women";
- "Harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism"; and
- "Situations of armed conflict" in which violations include "murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy."

In 1993, the General Assembly adopted the **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women**, which:

- Condemns any act causing "physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women," in the family or the general community or by the State;
- Warns States against "invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations" of basic protections for women;
- Urges officials to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence. It recommends establishing support mechanisms for victims and their children, and educational measures, including training of public officials, to raise awareness;
- Suggests intensified efforts in gender-based statistics-gathering, organizing women's advocacy groups and in United Nations system-wide activities.

Many States are heeding the calls for action. In the case of the traditional practice of female genital mutilation (FMG), some countries have taken concrete steps to curb the practice. For example, Kenya banned female genital mutilation in 1990 and Burkina Faso has incorporated into its draft constitution a prohibition on female circumcision.

THE DIVERSITY OF WOMEN

> *There is just one ... global agenda. But women will put different ... priorities on the issues based on where they come from and where they want to go. The result will be that societies will be different, but built equally on the visions of men and women.*
>
> — Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women

Today, international women's organizations are addressing a wide variety of situations and finding common ground that reflects the concerns of all women.

Respecting women's diversity is a prerequisite for international and intercultural dialogue among women's organizations. Priorities vary from region to region, but the world's women share a common feature: discrimination.

The regional meetings held in preparation for the Beijing conference identified different priorities in this regard. Trafficking in women has been a major concern voiced by women's movements in Asia. For African women, environmental management and food provision are still urgent needs. Women from some parts of the developing world stress literacy campaigns, while those from developed countries have focused on political and economic equality. [3]

The heterogeneity of women as a "group" was illustrated in a case study undertaken in the Philippines. [4] The study highlights ideological differences between educated middle- and upper-middle-class women in politics, and organizations of poor, uneducated women with urgent survival needs.

The report concludes that it is important for any agenda for women to reflect the prevailing conditions of women in all strata of society and respond to their needs and demands. Otherwise, it continues, "career feminism will liberate merely a tiny sector of the female population while perpetuating the socio-economic order that oppresses and exploits the majority of women."

The need for sensitivity to the broader socio-economic needs of all women as opposed to those of a relatively privileged elite is complicated by the broad range of differing priority concerns that characterize different regions of the world. For example:

- In the industrialized countries, the task is to eliminate more subtle forms of discrimination and "glass ceilings" that limit opportunities and advancement in the high echelons of the private and public sector;
- In developing regions, traditional practices and low levels of education are priority concerns.

Role in Development

The slow pace of development, particularly in rural areas, has underscored the long-standing neglect of women as a key element in development policy. Governments and the international development community are reformulating policies and reallocating resources in the understanding that the low social and economic status of women translates into slower rates of economic growth.

Previously, development policy-makers linked women's needs almost exclusively with public health and population issues such as nutrition, child-rearing and family planning. Women are now recognized as central agents of change and development, acting as an economic force. Programmes to advance women increasingly emphasize economic growth through productive employment and increased participation in decision-making. [5]

The majority of poor people in the world are women. In many developing countries, many structural adjustment programmes — characterized by market-oriented measures, privatization, cuts in social services, conditionality of loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — place a disproportionate burden on women by demanding greater productivity, while reducing services in education, health and child care. Still, there are encouraging signs. In Africa, a region with high illiteracy rates, countries such as Cameroon, Congo,

Senegal, Swaziland and Tanzania have achieved a parity between girls and boys in primary school enrolment.

Globally, the feminization of poverty is evident in the growing number of women, and women with dependent children, in the ranks of low-paid workers; or, as in Greece, Austria, Denmark and Eastern Europe in particular, women are increasing among the long-term unemployed.

Poverty among rural women is growing faster than among rural men, and an increasing number of households are headed by women; women often share unequally in household income and have little control over their earnings.

In times of crisis, hardship falls mainly on women as their food and other consumption tends to be reduced first; they take on additional responsibilities as the single heads of household if the male wage-earner leaves or abandons the family in search of livelihood elsewhere.

WOMEN AND DEMOCRATIZATION

> *All democratic experiments, all revolutions, all demands for equality have so far, in every instance, stopped short of sexual equality.*
>
> — Rosalind Miles, writer

In much of the developing world — from Brazil's Women's Movement for Amnesty and Chile's Women for Life to South Africa's Black Sash — women play prominent roles in democratizing their societies.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, authoritarian regimes in Latin America restricted parliamentary action and popular organizations. But organizations such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the Women's Group in Uruguay were among many that struggled to re-establish democracy. [6]

The present wave of democratization in the world, however, does not mean that women's concerns are automatically taken up by freely elected governments, nor does women's participation in politics automatically achieve the desired results.

The sudden transformation of the East European economies and political systems has caused major changes in people's lives including many freedoms and the promise of new opportunities. Under the former system, women were represented at middle and lower levels of decision-making and management. Now they are challenged by loss of work and social safety nets — and political marginalization, at least in the short-term.

Slavenka Drakulic, an outspoken women's advocate and journalist from former Yugoslavia, asserts that there is a concerted drive "to put women 'back where they belong,' into the house with children recognizing them only in their maternal function." [7]

Natalia Kraminova, a Russian journalist, wrote in the *Moscow News*: "We're concerned about the way new social organizations are turning into male strongholds. The woman question is not a question of minor socio-economic discrepancies, but part of the general question of human rights in our countries." [8]

Women in East European countries have experienced serious setbacks:

- They are more likely than men to lose their jobs and status;

- Health-care and child-care facilities, widely available before to women, now have been largely dismantled.

Privatization has had a differing impact on women and men. Growing evidence shows the exclusion of women from the process of acquiring state assets made available to private buyers.

Many women are left without opportunities with the elimination of the quota system, whereby women were reserved a minimum number of positions in the ruling party, government and in industry, engineering and science.

In some other countries, by comparison, women's active role in the process of democratization has induced significant political and legal changes in their favour. Where access to contraception was limited and in some cases illegal, in Romania for example, family-planning programmes have been introduced following legislative reform.

There are clear signs of progress elsewhere as well: Sudan, for example, has established a 10 per cent minimum quota level for women's representation in all positions of local, municipal and state government; and Argentina has implemented a law establishing quotas in the lists of political parties to guarantee a minimum of 30 per cent participation by women.

ROLE OF NATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Although the world's women's movements have multiplied in the last two decades, equal rights for women is hardly a new idea. Women's emancipation in modern times became a movement in the mid-19th century, mostly among the educated women in countries undergoing the industrial revolution.

- The first women's movements in the United States evolved from the abolitionist campaigns against slavery.

- The Industrial Revolution in Europe and North America, which saw the transfer of work from home to factory, also gave birth to labour and social movements, including women's organizations.

War helped determine the advancement of women in this century. During the two World Wars, women replaced men on farms and in factories of the industrialized world. As a result, the right to vote, education and fair employment achieved recognition in many countries. After World War II, women achieved suffrage in France and Japan, largely as a result of their war efforts.

- The non-industrialized countries were largely occupied with fighting colonialism and women's suffrage occurred in many cases soon after national independence was won.

- The socialist bloc countries officially promoted women's rights from their very inception. Although women played leading roles in government and the economy, they were usually excluded from policy- and decision-making at the highest levels.

In response to national women's movements, most UN Member States have governmental bodies to tackle women's issues. Many, however, still rely on NGOs to address the concerns of women.

The process of establishing national mechanisms for women at the governmental level began only in the late 1970s. Efforts have been increased to strengthen their programmes, to create instruments at the national, regional and local levels and to enhance their functions.

Nearly all countries in Western Europe have governmental mechanisms, sometimes min-

istries, devoted to women's affairs (an exception is the United Kingdom, which has a mixed governmental and non-governmental body).

The same is true in Africa and Latin America, where most mechanisms are governmental with the exceptions of Cuba, Bolivia and Panama. There are fewer governmental bodies in Asia and the Pacific.

National women's movements and governmental bodies play a strategic role in monitoring and improving the status of women. National organizations also disseminate information to women on their rights and entitlements.

Since they were called for by the World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, several UN Member States have created national mechanisms for women for the first time. The number of instruments at the local, regional and national levels increased notably where a strong governmental mechanism was already in place.

The Nairobi Conference also established goals — called **Forward-looking Strategies** — to achieve by the year 2000. The Review and Appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies observes:

- National machinery, despite resource limitations, has been significant in keeping the Strategies alive in individual countries;
- The effectiveness of national bodies depends on the political commitment of Governments, reflected in appropriate resource levels, institutional status, competence in technical fields and ability to use information. Improving these factors is essential to eliminate other obstacles.

The United Nations has increased support for national efforts by providing advisory, training and information services, and by coordinating exchanges among national organizations. Some UN organizations seek out partnerships with women's organizations and networks, directly supporting them, for example, to take part in national and international conferences.

ROLE OF NGOs

A recent international development of great importance and interest is the emergence of NGOs as advocates, arbiters and activists for the spectrum of issues from human rights to the environment, from political and economic accountability to media monitoring and consumer protection.

For the women's movement, NGOs are vitally important. Less hampered by the bureaucratic and political constraints of official bodies, they have access to information and local sources unavailable to Governments.

In the last two decades, the diversity and breadth of women's NGOs have increased rapidly. They span a range of interests and fields but their unifying force is the advancement of women and their rights.

In developing countries, working with local communities, these NGOs provide credit and marketing schemes, income-generating activities, health care, family-planning and education — including training in all fields.

NGOs are at the forefront of efforts to advance the status and conditions of women — from the Women's Networking Association in Cameroon to the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) of Ahmedabad, India.

The links between national and international efforts to advance women are direct, vital and increasingly effective. The Women's Tribunal, a parallel NGO event at the Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993), presented evidence and speakers from around the world on human rights violations, especially violence, against women.

Such NGO events can be highly effective at drawing public attention to issues by pooling resources through their highly developed networks.

- Collective campaigns, especially by NGOs, helped to pressure Governments to adopt the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1992). [9]
- Women's NGOs networks bring effective international pressure to bear, for example, in exposing the systematic violence and rape now used as weapons of warfare.
- International collaboration among women's groups has been crucial for spotlighting such issues as female genital mutilation, trafficking of women and AIDS.

OBSTACLES, TRENDS AND GOALS

The three themes of the United Nations Decade for Women were "Equality, Development and Peace." They are also the central themes of the Fourth World Conference on Women. These three themes are increasingly seen as mutually reinforcing and indivisible.

Women are vital to peace efforts. They are the silent majority — the mothers, farmers, workers and vendors — whose voices and needs have been ignored, but whose participation is essential for peace to exist at the local, regional or global level.

In the "global village", societies have more access to information about other cultures, values and ways of governing. Women also have unprecedented opportunities to become more unified, more tolerant, more creative in strategies for advancement.

Women are taking action. They are no longer spectators in the events of our times. The Fourth World Conference on Women provides an occasion for Governments, NGOs, grassroots organizations and the mass media to take the pulse of the burgeoning international women's movement. Delegates will explore ways to promote equality and the empowerment of women and all that it implies: access to all levels of decision-making, from the individual to village councils to government cabinets.

Among the principles and concerns contained in the Draft Platform for Action that will be finalized in Beijing are these:

- Empowerment starts in the family through respect for the independence and dignity of women as bread winners or bread makers, and demands for their entitlement to the rights and responsibilities of the household;
- Violence against women — cloaked in traditional practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), dowry deaths or female infanticide — requires universal condemnation and decisive action to eradicate;
- Systematic assaults on women during war and armed conflict — e.g. murder, rape, torture and forced prostitution — require special attention. Although war itself can be considered a violation of human rights, the specific injustices suffered by women flagrantly depart from all internationally recognized norms;

- The feminization of poverty is a worldwide phenomenon. Poverty eradication programmes must continue to focus on improving the incomes, health and education of women to release them from the downward economic spiral;
- Although more women are joining the work force, they are usually in lower-ranking, low-paying jobs with few opportunities for improving skills or promotion. Equal pay for equal work, access to child care and freedom from sexual harassment require redoubled efforts to confront and solve;
- Health-care services, including maternal health, family-planning and reproductive rights, are still unavailable to many women. The Vienna Declaration on Human Rights includes women's right to "the highest standard of physical and mental health throughout their lives" as a human right.

Many current trends are hopeful:

- More women now enter non-traditional fields: medicine, law, engineering and science. Women have joined the ranks of electricians, biologists and truck drivers, shattering stereotypes and expanding the job market for half of humanity;
- The number of female university graduates continues to swell, despite high illiteracy rates among women and low school attendance rates for girls in some areas. The next generation will furnish the world economy with a growing supply of female professionals and managers;
- Women's participation in the political arena has improved dramatically in recent years. There are more female prime ministers, members of parliament and policy makers than ever before — though far from the 30 per cent representation level considered to be the "critical mass" for real influence;
- In the information age, public awareness about women's issues has intensified. The messages — to stop violence and discrimination, to combat sex stereotypes and promote positive, accurate images of women — are spreading.

The future is bright despite the immensity of the challenge. With the increased participation of women in politics, and the widespread adoption and enforcement of more equitable and gender-sensitive laws, the international community can more effectively undertake the task of creating a more sustainable, prosperous and healthy world order.

UN WORLD CONFERENCES ON WOMEN AND OTHER UN EVENTS

The **first world conference on women,** the World Conference of the International Women's Year, was held in Mexico City in 1975 and marked the starting point for achieving international consensus on women's rights. The Conference determined that women's roles are closely linked to the political, economic, social and cultural conditions that constrain them from advancement and that factors determining the economic exploitation, marginalization and oppression of women stem from chronic inequalities, injustices and exploitative conditions at all levels.

Deliberations were hampered by cultural and regional misunderstandings, especially by differences in perception between North and South. The greatest accomplishment was opening the channels of communication for establishing an international network of players involved in women's issues, a network including the United Nations, Governments and NGOs that has grown stronger and expanded in the ensuing years.

The **United Nations Decade for Women** (1976-85), whose themes were "Equality, Development and Peace" highlighted global issues of women's rights and women's role in development and inspired a wide range of activities throughout the world, especially the establishment and reinforcement of national bodies to monitor and promote the advancement of women. The Decade was instrumental in bringing to light the diversified needs of women and in publicizing the role of women in development and the need to promote a perspective in policy making and planning.

In 1980, the UN held the **second world conference on women** in Copenhagen. The Conference declared that equality entails not only legal recognition and elimination of *de jure* discrimination, but de facto equality of responsibilities and opportunities for the participation of women in development, both as beneficiaries and as active agents of change. Dialogue was characterized by political controversy, particularly the demands for including the situation of women under apartheid and Zionism on the agenda. Nevertheless, the grounds for consensus were growing with common support for progress in the fields of education, health and employment.

A breakthrough occurred in 1985, at the end of the UN Decade for Women, in Nairobi at the **third world conference on women**. Many referred to this meeting as no less than the "birth of global feminism." Dialogue was aided by a flood of information gathered during the Decade and by heightened understanding and mutual respect particularly among advocates for the advancement of women that had been fostered in the years between conferences. The major issues at Nairobi were still closely linked to women's basic survival strategies, with emphasis on poverty and education.

At the third world conference on women, participants adopted by consensus the **Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to the year 2000** (NFLS). The comprehensive Strategies call for the participation of women as equal partners with men in all fields of work, equal opportunity for education and training, protection of women at work and recognition of women's needs to become effective producers or managers of political, economic and social affairs. The document called for efforts to overcome prejudices, stereotyped thinking and obstacles to women joining previously male-dominated professions including promotion to decision-making positions. It further declared that the role of women in national liberation struggles should be recognized and their equal participation in the nation-building process afterwards be encouraged.

The **World Summit for Children** (New York, 1990) emphasized disadvantages faced by girls compared to boys in its review of the global status of children. It issued a **World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children** that called for "strengthening the role of women in general and ensuring their equal rights will be to the advantage of the world's children." Girls must be given equal treatment from birth.

The Declaration stressed the importance of maternal health and family planning as fundamental rights of women that are also connected to the well-being of children. It also stated that "equal opportunity should be provided for the girl child to benefit from the health, nutrition, education and other basic services to enable her to grow to her full potential."

The **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development** (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) recognized the pervasive role of women in sustainable development and in environmental protection. Since women constitute a large number of the world's agricultural producers and in many cultures are responsible for securing water and fuel supplies for their families, they are vital in any efforts to safeguard the environment. The **Plan of Action for Sustainable Development, Agenda 21**, called for the involvement of women in the management and protection of natural resources, particularly in rural areas.

The **World Conference on Human Rights** (Vienna, 1993) reaffirmed that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and that the human rights of women are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. It also recognized violence against women as a violation of their human rights as well as the systematic violation of those rights in situations of war or armed conflict. The **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action** was adopted by the consensus of 171 Member States of the United Nations. The Conference recommendation to establish a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and to adopt the Declaration on Violence Against Women were subsequently agreed to by the 48th General Assembly later that year.

The **International Conference on Population and Development** (Cairo, 1994) emphasized that the empowerment and autonomy of women are bases for development. It reviewed the status of women worldwide, especially in light of their access to adequate health, maternal care and family planning facilities. The final conference document reinforced women's right of choice in child-bearing, and underlined the critical importance to society as a whole of education for girls and women.

The **World Summit for Social Development** (Copenhagen, 1995) called attention to the pivotal role of women in development. It also focused attention on women's social issues and the discriminatory practices that prevent their full participation in society.

NOTES

1. Kristen Timothy, Deputy Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women and Coordinator of the Fourth World Conference on Women, from presentation to preparatory meeting to the Fourth World Conference on Women, New York, October 1994.
2. *Second Review and Appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, January 1995 draft.
3. *UN Chronicle*, "Perspective UN Decade for Women", Volume 7, 1985, p. xii.
4. Socorro L. Reyes, *Asia Pacific Women's Studies Journal* 1992, Institute of Women's Studies, Manila.
5. *Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, Report of the Secretary-General, A/C.167, 31 October 1994, p. 11.
6. Brazilian writer Jacqueline Pitanguy, IPU Symposium, "Women and Government," p. 49.
7. *Women and Government: New Ways to Political Power* edited by Mim Kelber, Women USA Fund Study, 1994.
8. Ibid.
9. See note 5, p. 149.

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Women and Work

Women, of course, have always worked. Today, in addition to the traditional unpaid labour required to maintain a household, which often involves growing food and securing water and fuel supplies, women increasingly take on paid work outside the home to augment personal and family income.

The world over, these dual responsibilities — respectively termed "reproductive" and "productive" by social scientists — have always played a vital role in human economic activity. Although women as workers have traditionally been regarded as dependent adjuncts of their husbands, partners or closest male kin, the rapid influx of women into labour markets worldwide over the past three decades has become a key factor in the growing independence of women, economically, socially and legally.

Increasingly, too, their "household" work, long taken for granted, is being acknowledged as a central contribution to society's wealth.

Similarly, their right to equality with working men is finally being recognized. Equally important, the new-found economic independence of millions of women has inevitably caused dramatic transformation of women's self-image, their growing sense of independence as well as mounting responsibilities and expectations at home and in their communities. [1]

TOWARDS EQUALITY

Although women now constitute 30 per cent of the global industrial force, legal hurdles and traditional barriers still hinder the vast majority of women in their efforts to achieve parity with men.

The pioneering efforts of the International Labour Organization (ILO) led the way for increased world attention on the concerns of working women. Many ILO principles and standards were integrated much later into the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, which was adopted by the UN in 1979. CEDAW clearly spells out the fundamental rights of women in the work force:

- The right to work as an inalienable human right;
- Equal employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for hiring;
- The rights to promotion, job security and vocational training and retraining;
- The right to equal pay for equal work — still far from a reality in nearly all countries.

CEDAW also outlines the rights of rural women to help overcome the special problems they face in their vital — usually unpaid — roles in agriculture:

- Participation in development planning at all levels;

- Access to extension services;
- Organization of self-help groups and cooperatives;
- Access to credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal access to land and other property.

In addition, building upon ILO's 1952 **Convention on Maternity Protection**, CEDAW includes provisions for the recognition of maternity as a social function. It calls for the establishment of services, notably child-care facilities, "to enable parents to combine family obligations with work."

Above and beyond these basic rights, women need more access to economic resources and control over them: land, capital, technology and, increasingly, information. The work of many UN organizations has sought to support advancement in these areas. Some examples:

- **Land:** Since its 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has encouraged Governments to focus on land use within a household unit — notably the plot on which the woman of the house grows food, rather than cash crops, which tend to be produced by men — and to design programmes of land redistribution in response to women's needs;
- **Capital:** Since the 1980s, UNICEF, like many other members of the UN family — notably the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development — has worked to expand women's access to credit. In Cartagena, Colombia, for example, it has helped form "solidarity groups" of three to five women who operate the same kind of business in the informal sector and who need small sums to expand their enterprises. Peer pressure to repay, in addition to the incentives of further and larger loans, as well as technical assistance in management and marketing, has resulted in a repayment rate of nearly 100 per cent; [2]
- **Technology:** The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has funded workshops for women farmers in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand on the use of locally produced, environmentally sound pesticides, rather than costly, hazardous, imported chemicals; [3]
- **Information:** The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has funded projects on data gathering and media production to give rural women access to information technology.

UNDP and other agencies place a great deal of emphasis on the design of projects that further the integration of women in development. As UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth explains: " ... sustainable human development is people-centred, participatory, pro-poor and therefore pro-women." [4]

PAID WORK

Many forces are channelling women increasingly into the world of paid work. These include:

- Widespread decreases in male income;
- Impoverished rural homesteads;
- Changing family structures, notably the emergence of female-headed households;
- Heightened expectations, especially for children;

- Urbanization;
- Expanded educational and career opportunities;
- Reach of telecommunications into remote areas;
- Industrialization;
- Consumerism.

Women's participation in the labour market, both formal and informal, during the last decade has grown an average of 10 per cent in all regions of the world — twice the rate of men. [5]

In developing countries, the percentage of women in the paid labour force increased from 28 per cent in 1950 to 41 per cent in 1993. [6] The average ratio of women to men in the economically active population — according to ILO, all who provide labour for the production of economic goods and services — doubled worldwide between 1970 and 1990:

- In **Africa,** from 39 to 71 women for each 100 men;
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean,** from 35 to 62;
- In **Western Europe and North America,** from 45 to 72;
- In **Asia and the Pacific,** from 28 to 48, most markedly from 1970 to 1980;
- In **Eastern Europe,** from 79 to 85. [7]

THE WAGE GAP

On average, women the world over receive 30 to 40 per cent less than men for work of comparable value — whether in cash or kind, in benefits or food. In cash terms alone, women's earnings continue to fall short of men's:

- In the United Kingdom, women earn on average 70 per cent of men's wages;
- In Kenya, 74 per cent;
- In Brazil, 51 per cent;
- In the Republic of Korea, 51 per cent;
- In Japan, 43 per cent. [8, 9]

Nor has national legislation succeeded in bridging the pervasive wage gap. Where it has begun to narrow, as in many developed countries, it is due not only to increased paychecks for women, but shrinking salaries for men. [10]

HIGHER UNEMPLOYMENT

Women also represent a disproportionate share of the unemployed in every age group and in every region:

- In some **Latin American and Caribbean** countries, women account for more than two thirds of total unemployment; their unemployment rate is double that of men;
- In **Eastern and Central Europe,** female unemployment has risen to an alarming 60 per cent since the collapse of Communist regimes beginning in 1988;

- Even in **Asia**, where women have moved rapidly into export manufacturing in the newly industrialized countries (NICs), available data indicate higher unemployment rates for women than for men in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. In Indonesia, the unemployment rate for women who have finished secondary school is almost twice as high as for their male counterparts. [11]

THE FORMAL SECTOR — NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW PROBLEMS

Since the early days of the Industrial Revolution in the Western world and now the world over, women have tended to find work in the formal sector only in low-wage, low-status jobs, whether in manufacturing or services:

- Manufacturing work often reflects traditional female household tasks, such as processing and serving food and producing textiles and clothing;
- Office work usually entails women serving men. Clerical and secretarial work, both in the private and public sectors, has been feminized almost universally. [12]

In today's world of work, in both developed countries and the NICs, women are moving rapidly into the areas of highest growth:

- Light industry — women, who for centuries performed skilled tasks of sewing, basket-making and handicrafts, now produce precision instruments and electronic parts;
- Informatics — women perform data-entry tasks rather than programming or repair;
- Modern services, such as finance or communications — in which, women are more likely to staff the switchboard than to occupy the boardroom. [13]

According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), women in industry in the mid-1990s find themselves in a world very different from the previous decade. The globalization of industrial production, the structural adjustment programmes in many developing countries, and the transformation of centrally planned economies have also had fundamental effects on the industrialization process. Production has shifted from labour-intensive, assembly-line oriented systems to become skill- and technology-intensive, and from import-substitution to export-led growth and trade.

The competitive advantage enjoyed by developing countries, often based on plentiful and cheap labour, is gradually being eroded by increasing technological innovations and competition from other labour markets. The introduction of computerized technologies and automation has reduced the importance of labour-intensive production significantly, rendering predominantly "typically female" occupations redundant, i.e., low-skilled assembly jobs in industrialized as well as industrializing countries.

Within this context, women have borne the brunt of technological redundancy and unemployment brought about by industrial restructuring, technological changes and relocation patterns. Insofar as one can speak of global cultural biases as pertains to gender, this is a remaining vestige: women tend to have less technological training than men. Women at all levels are losing ground because technologies are playing an increasing role in all services.

- According to UNIDO, in general, when technologies are introduced to a sector, women with few or no skills are displaced by men.

- Educated women in transition economies are finding that their specific skills have become obsolete.

- Men have been targeted almost exclusively for retraining. Women need to build on the skills they already possess through upgrading or retraining, to make them competitive in the very markets which have now rendered them unemployed.

Women in management also need to acquire new skills in order to maintain their positions. Women entrepreneurs and managers need to adjust to new structures, which require a combination of skills in technology, reading markets, product design and adaptation, quality control, pricing, marketing, personnel management, leadership.

In the NICs, women constitute some 80 per cent of the workforce of export-oriented manufacturing — not only because of their manual dexterity, according to Lin Lean Lim, an ILO Senior Specialist, but perhaps even more important because of "their greater docility, ... deference to command, willingness to subject themselves to the rigid discipline and tedious monotony of the assembly line and their lower likelihood to form or join unions". [14]

Yet, as one Asian labour expert has remarked, "With industrialization, women in the Asian NICs have for the first time in history been able to earn incomes instead of playing the centuries-old role of unpaid mother-wife-labourer." [15]

The increasing flexibility of today's markets — changes in regulations, contracts, and practices that make it easier both to hire and fire workers — has also opened new pathways for women to enter the formal sector.

- Part-time work is increasingly a female phenomenon; in almost all developed economies, the majority of those employed part-time are women. [16]

While many labour leaders fear that this trend may undermine hard-won rights, reduce career prospects and weaken both job protection and social security, women's groups since the 1960s have argued that greater flexibility in working hours as well as part-time arrangements can benefit workers and their families.

- "There is a danger of judging ... the operation of the labour market according to standards which see full-time, life-long jobs ... as the desirable 'norm' to which all workers aspire ...", said labour expert Diane Elson. [17] "This is a male norm that most women have never enjoyed and many women do not want."

- "As long as the rights of workers are safeguarded," said Susan Bullock, "the disintegration of traditional forms of 'regular work' may create the basis for progressive social transformation."

By contrast, others feel that this kind of employment for women may represent a trade-off of quantity for quality and may eventually lead to paring down benefits such as health care, maternity leave and unemployment insurance.

WOMEN AS BUSINESS OWNERS AND MANAGERS

> *The results of women entrepreneurs ... may be misjudged if compared to men's. The mystique of entrepreneurship, often male-centred, needs to be understood so as to make room for both men's and women's entrepreneurial styles. Men and women become entrepreneurs for different reasons. At the risk of oversimplification, it could be said that while men go into business to make a killing, women go into business hoping to make a living.* [18]
>
> — Claire L. Bangasser, *Women Entrepreneurs*

Women are increasingly turning to self-employment and establishing their own enterprises.

- In the United States and Canada, women own 30 per cent of all businesses. In the US, women are forming small businesses at almost twice the rate of men and employ one worker out of every ten — more people than all the Fortune 500 companies combined.

- In **Latin America**, women represent 15 to 20 per cent of all employers, concentrated largely in the commercial and service sectors. [19]

Women go into business for themselves for all sorts of reasons, ranging from limited opportunities elsewhere to entrepreneurial drive.

- The fact that she was nine months pregnant did not deter 35-year-old Jane Royston from convincing a group of senior Swiss managers that they needed the services and products of the small software company she had founded in 1987; she had grown tired of hitting her head on the "glass ceiling" of the multinational for which she worked. In 1993, she was named Swiss businesswoman of the year. [20]

- Half a world away in an Indian slum, 30 year-old Elvasrasi cooks savoury breakfast rice for customers on a tiny stove outside her mud hut. Her decision to become an entrepreneur stemmed from despair at watching her husband drink himself unconscious as her children starved. [21]

WOMEN ON THE LAND

> *The women of Africa with very poor technology have managed to feed that continent. They are empowering those Governments that would have collapsed had there been a food crisis. And the women of Asia are empowering their male Governments by their informal activities that now compose the breakthrough in Asian trade balances.*
>
> — Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Informal remarks, 8 March 1994

Subsistence agriculture still dominates the working lives of more than half the world's women. The true value of their labour, says the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), is difficult to measure because so few of their activities are monetized.

- In **Asia** alone, some 375 million landless female labourers — more than Western Europe's entire population — perform exhausting menial chores like weeding, hoeing and milling, while living with the concern that the increasing mechanization of agriculture will deprive them of the seasonal work to which they still have access. [22]

- In **Africa**, women produce 78 per cent of the continent's food — meat as well as staple grains — on subsistence plots to which the vast majority hold no title. They receive only 2 to 13 per cent of the technical assistance and training provided by extension services. [23] Lack of ownership often bars them from loans that could improve their small and often marginal lands.

- Although statistics for **Latin America** are sparse — in large measure because women are seen primarily as housewives — it is estimated that almost half of family income in the overcrowded and poor small-farm sector is generated by women and that on many such holdings, women are replacing men as the mainstay of farm labour. [24]

THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The data on women working in the informal sector reveal a mix of positive and negative trends. Flexible, precarious and now far more dynamic than the formal sector in many regions, the informal sector has always absorbed female labour and continues to do so.

Between 70 and 90 per cent of women in developing countries now work in businesses that are unregistered and largely unregulated — and under conditions that frequently threaten health and are sometimes tantamount to slavery. [25]

The good news is that the changes — the opening of markets, the trend toward privatization, the encouragement of entrepreneurship — are also opportunities.

Governments in developing countries seeking new sources for promoting economic growth will find hitherto untapped potential in many small-scale, informal activities traditionally conducted by women. In the majority of developing countries, women make a substantial contribution to output and value added of the manufacturing sector. Small-scale industries constitute one of the areas where women's role is most pronounced. Because of the lack of opportunities for them in the formal sector, they take up or take part in activities in the informal production sector out of necessity, and now dominate that sector.

Yet, the entrepreneurial potential that exists in these activities is rarely realized beyond the basic level required to sustain the family. According to UNIDO, despite the importance of the informal sector for overall economic growth, and women's dominant position in it, they do not receive support. The large number of women in small-scale and micro-industries often lack access to resources to fulfill their production and profit potential, and to alternatives to technologies and production methods detrimental to themselves and to the environment.

Micro-enterprises

Women today own and operate approximately half of the world's micro-enterprises according to UN estimates. At a time when the formal job market is failing to provide employment for the 43 million job seekers who now enter the workforce each year, these micro-enterprises furnish between 40 and 66 per cent of urban employment: [26]

- Many are extensions of agricultural activities, such as the processing and marketing of home-grown produce and fishing catches;

- Others comprise cottage crafts such as basketry, weaving, the crafting of clay utensils for cooking and storing food and other handmade products;

- Still others are flourishing services such as trading used goods, dressmaking operations and curbside beauty salons.

The ease of entry to such work makes it a natural option for women who face obstacles in the formal labour market. According to the ILO, the other major characteristics of these informal enterprises are:

- Reliance on local resources;
- Family ownership;
- Small-scale operations;
- Labour-intensive work, using low-cost technology;
- The use of skills acquired outside schooling;
- An irregular and competitive market. [27]

Such micro-businesses have been hailed as evidence of women's resourcefulness and entrepreneurial skill, vital counterparts to failed efforts at industrialization or rural development.

Homeworking

A contemporary form of the piecework system in which pay is based on the units produced and which has faded in most affluent societies, "homeworking" provides income — usually at a pittance — to millions of women throughout the developing world who are tied to domestic chores, especially child care, throughout the working day.

It includes, for example, the production of lacework and embroidery and the rolling of "beedis", the poor man's cigarette on the Indian sub-continent. Often it is the last stage in a sub-contracting chain that assembles or produces goods for Western markets: toys, garments, shoes, lampshades — and components for high-tech industries. [28]

Child Labour

To secure family survival, many parents throughout the developing world indenture their children, particularly their daughters, as domestics and slave-like semi-skilled labour in underground enterprises that evade regulations of minimum wages and maximum hours:

- In India's match factories, girls below the age of 15 work for up to 10 hours a day. [29]
- In Peru alone, 1.5 million girls are live-in maids, whose education is often neglected and they are frequently subject to sexual abuse. [30]

Child labour is also flourishing anew in economies in transition: petty criminals use minors to evade law enforcement in the former Soviet Union and girls sweatshops are cropping up elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Migrant Labour

While not strictly a characteristic of the informal sector, migrant work often fits in this category. In their search for livelihoods, women are moving not only from the countryside to cities, but from one country to another:

- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, women's migration has reached the same levels as men's;

- According to Lin Lean Lim's paper "Women at Work in Asia and the Pacific: Recent Trends and Future Challenges," for the UN/ILO International Forum on Equality for Women in the World of Work, the demand for male guest workers is slackening because of a slowdown in construction in the Middle East. Instead it is women who give up hearth and family for work overseas, mainly as housemaids, entertainers (including prostitutes), nurses and helpers in retail shops and restaurants. Many Asian countries, he says, "have come to rely increasingly on 'the comparative advantage of women's disadvantages'." [31]

Because of their relative lack of information and security, women are far more likely than men:

- To be charged exorbitant fees for finding work abroad;
- To find that these jobs involve prostitution or domestic service;
- To be promised wages that are never paid.

Another reason why female migrant workers tend to be more vulnerable, explains Lim, is that they go into individualized situations, such as domestics in households, where there is greater isolation and lower likelihood of establishing networks of information and support compared to men working in groups, such as on construction sites. [32]

ORGANIZING WOMEN

> *When we are isolated, we are weak. How can there be a noise from a single hand? But if we form a group and then clap, a loud noise can be made.*
> —Working Women's Forum/UNICEF film

Much of the upsurge in grass-roots efforts to fulfill basic needs and to win human rights in both reproductive and productive work has resulted from the action of women's organizations.

- In Ahmedabad, India, since 1972, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA — which also means "service" in Hindi) has organized home-workers, hawkers and small vendors into savings and credit cooperatives to provide working capital to its members, as well as better prices for their goods. It also offers training in traditional male skills such as carpentry, plumbing, radio repair, accounting and management. It has also secured legal recognition for women in the informal sector as workers and access to the rights embodied in labour legislation. [33]
- In Sierra Leone in 1976, the women farmers who joined the Kassasi Women's Agricultural Organization (KWADA) drained and cultivated a communal swampland to increase food supplies and income. The sale of the first harvest subsidized the next larger one. Accorded a respect they had never known previously, the women became involved in the decision-making of their village. [34]

THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

The workforce for the most precarious and least-rewarding work in the informal sector remain the most poorly paid. Extreme poverty, which is distinguished by the inability to obtain adequate nutrition and essential non-food requirements, shackles more than 1.3 billion people the world over, roughly one-fifth of the global population, according to UNDP. Many of those who fall into this category are women. Some put the figure as high as 70 per cent.

Although largely a phenomenon of developing countries, extreme poverty is no stranger to affluent societies. There, too, the brunt is borne by women:

- By the end of the 1980s, approximately 75 per cent of all poverty in the United States was concentrated among women, particularly single mothers and older African-American women, many of whom head households of grandchildren. The number of families headed by poor women is rising by some 100,000 each year;
- Without welfare payments, 70 per cent of all single mothers with dependent children in the Netherlands would slip below the poverty line. [35]

Throughout the developing world, notably in its rural areas, it is not uncommon to find households in which women's and children's malnutrition coexist with male spending on such comparative luxuries as digital watches and transistor radios. [36]

- When family income sinks, poor women — and often their working daughters — make sacrifices to maintain the welfare of their husbands, sons and brothers.
- In Bangladesh, women wage-earners in poor households have only 1.3 meals a day as compared to 2.4 eaten by men. [37]
- When poverty threatens or strikes, women's assets are often sold before those of men. [38]
- Once poverty reaches a point perceived as desperate in many societies, men sometimes abandon their families, leaving the mothers with impossible responsibilities. [39]
- The privatization of traditional common properties — woodlands, meadows, springs, ponds and streams — affects poor rural women severely, especially where they still perform the traditional tasks of gathering fuel, fodder and water for their households. [40]

Economies in Transition

The transition from Communism to market economies in Central and Eastern Europe has radically lowered living standards and impoverished many women — among them the highly skilled and educated.

- In a gender backlash, male managers are recruiting men even in previously female-dominated sectors. [41]
- In its report to the UN's Division for the Advancement of Women in 1993, the Government of Kyrgyzstan concluded that "the feminization of poverty has become the distinctive feature of the post-Soviet period." Three quarters of that country's unemployed are women. In Poland, women accounted for almost 60 per cent of the school graduates registered as unemployed. Only in the Czech Republic has women's unemployment remained unchanged in the shift to market economies. [42]
- A 1991 survey in the Russian Federation revealed that a growing number of men feel that a woman's place is in the home. In the media, many social problems, including increases in petty crime, have been blamed on "the emancipation of women." [43]

Nonetheless, in many of these countries, women are taking on entrepreneurial roles in small businesses that they could not have assumed under Communism. Women retain a dominant position in the less remunerative services of several Central European countries — education, health and social care — and their share in these occupations is increasing. [44]

THE IMPACT OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

"Women have been at the centre of the [economic crisis of the 1980s] and have borne the brunt of adjustment efforts," declared the Commonwealth Expert Group on Structural Adjustment. [45]

Although apparently gender-neutral, structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have demanded more of women than of men in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. They reduced services essential to family welfare and, in many cases, reversed female economic gains achieved during the three prior decades.

Everywhere, government cuts in social services, including food subsidies, have increased the burden of poor working women, especially for those who head households. Many have resorted to bare survival strategies, among these:

- Reducing family consumption of fundamental necessities, including food;
- Withdrawing their children, particularly daughters, from school;
- Sending their children — even bonding them — into demeaning and often dangerous work, including prostitution and foraging in dumps.

"Women's health has been adversely affected by increased hours of work and by reduced availability of food and health care facilities," the Commonwealth Expert Group on Structural Adjustment reported. "Less healthy women are less efficient and this reduces their productivity in each of their roles, thereby diminishing national health and welfare." Others have pointed out related problems:

- Malnutrition rates among children rose by 50 per cent in both Ghana and Peru during the first half of the 1980s. Nutrition deficiency-related deaths increased by 20 per cent in Zaire between 1981 and 1987; [46]
- Of the poorest countries implementing structural adjustment policies, 37 halved their health budgets, shifting health care costs almost entirely onto poor mothers, just as prices of essential medicines soared to prohibitive heights; [47]
- Female school enrolments dropped by as much as 50 per cent in many rural areas of Africa as school fees were introduced and families withdrew their girls from class to help grow food, perform other household chores and earn money outside the home;
- In post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe, the closure of child-care facilities formerly paid for by Governments has forced women to reduce their dwindling incomes by paying for such services or to reduce their paid working hours.

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING FEMALE POVERTY

> *"The feminization of poverty raises complex questions as to the role of the welfare state in the reduction of poverty," states the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). "It has become apparent that the simple redistribution of income by means of government transfers does not always work towards a solution to the problem of poverty, let alone the reversal of the feminization trend, and that it often leads to the perpetuation of both."* [48]

At present, there are three major approaches to reducing female poverty that move away from traditional State-controlled safety nets:

- Emphasis on the role of the market in creating income-generating opportunities for women. An important aspect of this approach is recognition that the sustainable basis for economic growth — rather than the rate of growth — determines whether it will benefit or marginalize women.

- Emphasis on expanding the rights of the poor, notably through education, training, credit, information, and participation in development planning. The challenge is to maximize the potential of the market, minimize its hostile influences and provide public assistance in the least distortive way.

- A third approach to the eradication of female poverty "requires the recognition of women's economic potential and should aim at enhancing women's capabilities," concludes DAW. "Conversely, the agenda for development should begin with targeting women in poverty, because time and again experience shows that any approach to poverty reduction that leaves the economic status of women unchanged tends not to achieve its goal." [49]

REVALUING WOMEN'S WORK

> *Within traditional GDP and GNP categories [the measure of Gross Domestic and Gross National Products], the whole spectrum of social productivity from the reproduction of human beings in the household to the maintenance of relationships that promote the cohesion of the community are ignored. The devaluing of this work runs parallel to the subordinate status of women, since it is women who do most of this 'caring and sustaining'. To link productivity only with paid employment continues to render invisible the enormous amount of unpaid work that women do that undergirds and subsidizes all other kinds of work.*
>
> — Juan Somavía, summation of the exchange of views of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development, 1993

The world over, women's dual responsibilities, even in affluent societies, translate into longer working hours than those of men, many unpaid.

Some experts hold that if women's unpaid work were factored into national accounting systems, GDP would increase by 30 to 40 per cent.

- Argentina has calculated the value of the domestic activity carried on by its women and estimates that it amounts to between 28 per cent and 49 per cent of its GDP.

In its report submitted to CEDAW, Argentina has stressed the need for domestic production to be included among the indicators of national production.

- In certain provinces of Argentina, local legislation has provided for retirement pensions for housewives. A Housewives' Union has been organized, with more than 80,000 members in 30 branches throughout the country, that provides medical services to its members. It has submitted a bill which envisages a wage for housewives, pension rights and their own social security.

The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), in collaboration with the UN Statistical Division, has developed a framework for counting and valuing the unpaid and usually invisible economic contributions of women by measuring their use of time.

- In one developing country, a typical woman's day was 30 hours long, after housework and child care (some of these tasks performed simultaneously) were calculated and added to the task of growing the family's food. [50]

Although women's tasks in household management differ from rural to urban areas, from region to region, and from class to class, their responsibilities in family care *vis-à-vis* men remains largely predominant. For this reason the equal sharing of household responsibilities with male partners is an improvement that would have immediate and widespread impact on the quality of women's lives.

- Mothers and mother-surrogates are responsible not only for the physical well-being of children, but their cognitive development as well. Since children "process" more information during the first two years of life than in all the years to come, their mothers are their most important educators.

- Women's traditional roles also encompass the care of the elderly; given increasing life expectancy the world over, women will be responsible for extended care of their relatives.

- The line between family and community is often thin. Women not only organize the parent-teacher association in affluent North American suburbs, but communal kitchens in the slums of South American cities.

During the last 20 years, the issue of home-making as a fulfilling career for women has received growing attention.

- A 1992 ILO survey carried out in the Czech and Slovak republics revealed that only 28 per cent of married working women would willingly give up their jobs if their husbands' salaries increased sufficiently. By contrast, 43 per cent of the men interviewed stated they would prefer their wives to stay at home if the household could afford it.

OBSTACLES, TRENDS AND GOALS

According to Lin Lean Lim, author of a paper entitled "Women at Work in Asia and the Pacific: Recent Trends and Future Challenges," appropriate policies and programmes for women's productive employment would offer a window of opportunity for countries to get out of the poverty trap and would also promote the social integration of currently excluded groups. [51]

The planning of productive employment options for women should include:

- Finding innovative and effective alternatives (beyond social safety nets) for the protection and organization of women workers in various types of vulnerable situations;

- Promoting female entrepreneurship and encouraging and supporting the successful setting up of micro-enterprises by women, especially those in the informal sector;

- Helping women cope with the impact of new technologies, which will necessitate:
  - — Providing appropriate skills training and retraining programmes;
  - — Strengthening labour relations so that employers and workers together can establish procedural rules for the introduction of technology changes and related problems;
  - — Improving the advertising of job opportunities in the labour market;
  - — Providing social protection and retraining for those suffering technological unemployment.

Some trends are the focus of growing concern, such as:

- Government negligence in bringing laws into conformity with CEDAW and ILO conventions;
- Practices and attitudes, notably sexual harassment, that tend to perpetuate occupational segregation;
- The danger of marginalizing female labour in tight job markets;
- Emergence of the "glass ceiling" the world over in which female executives are stalled in middle-management jobs.

Nonetheless, other emerging trends are promoting gender equality in the working world. The growing need and/or preference of women to work outside the household is liberalizing traditional male and female attitudes towards paid work, even in countries where women have been secluded.

Partly as a result of these changing attitudes, new opportunities and career paths are opening up for women the world over — from construction and metal-working trades in Latin America, East Africa and North America to engineering, urban planning, finance and international law among university-educated women.

To assure that these advances of women in the area of work continue, the priority goals of guaranteeing women equal access to employment opportunities and equal pay for work of equal value are likely to remain at the top of the women's agenda.

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Women's Health

The health status of women and the disparities in health between the sexes are often critical indicators of equity in a society.

— Intersectoral Action for Health, WHO, 1986

Women throughout their lives have unequal access to health-care systems and services relative to men, a fact that has received serious attention only since the 1985 Nairobi Conference on Women. In recent years, health-care services have expanded globally reaching out to both men and women in larger numbers. However, the special needs of women are often overlooked by health-care professionals and planners.

This is as true in the developed world as in developing regions, and especially so in the case of poor women.

Since the situation has not improved in any dramatic way in recent decades, women's health is now a central concern reflected in the Draft Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995. The Draft Platform proposes several measures — from providing universal family-planning services to non-formal health education for women and girls — that can be implemented at the local, national and international levels in order to increase women's access, throughout their lives, to appropriate, affordable and quality health care and related services.

The **Global Commission on Women's Health**, [1] established by the World Health Assembly in 1992 to advance the cause of women's health, considers it imperative to look at women's health within a life-cycle perspective; in other words, throughout the evolving stages of a woman's life. The health conditions in one phase of a woman's life not only affect subsequent phases of her own life, but also have an impact on future generations. This intergenerational link is a characteristic unique to women.

In this chapter, we follow the life-cycle approach to explain some of the more important health concerns of women.

GIRL CHILD

The health of women is a telling window on female inequality, and it is most telling at the most vulnerable time of life: infancy and early childhood.

— Girls and Women: A UNICEF Development Priority, 1993

The girl child, as UNICEF categorizes the female child up to the age of 15, has become the focus of attention in recent years. Several areas, such as education, work and health, are being re-examined with the specific needs of the girl child in mind.

As today's girl is tomorrow's woman and will bear the responsibility for a new generation, it is imperative that the health needs of girls are met.

In many societies and families, **early childhood** can be a severe test of survival for the girl child.

Although female children enjoy the biological advantage of being more resistant to infection and malnutrition, the mortality rate of the girl child in the two-to-five age group is higher than that of the boy child in the same age group in a number of developing countries. [2]

- In Bangladesh, the under-five mortality rate for girls was recorded as 175 per 1,000 live births, as against 160 for boys and in Nepal, 187 for girls as against 173 for boys. In India, there are 957 females aged four years or less for every 1,000 males in the population. [3]

Why this discrepancy? Several studies suggest that the existing higher mortality rates of the girl child in many developing countries are not due to poverty or biological reasons, but because of a preference for boys that can lead to discriminatory treatment of girls in terms of food, basic health provision and even parental care. This male preference has complex historical roots that vary from culture to culture. In many traditional societies, the preference for boys stems on the reliance on males as primary bread-winners and providers of security in the parents' old age, while females are accorded secondary support roles.

Although breast-feeding is a traditional practice in developing regions, some traditions negatively affect the girl child. One such tradition, practised particularly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, is early weaning of a female infant — usually intended to enable early conception of another child, preferably a male.

Curtailing breast-feeding deprives a baby girl not only of nutrients and antibodies in her mother's milk but also of maternal interaction and bonding that is essential for later cognitive and psychological development.

UNICEF and WHO have consistently and vigorously promoted **breast-feeding** in their safe-motherhood programmes and they have also identified another reason for a decline in breast-feeding, especially in the industrial world: the promotion of infant-food formulas by the baby-food industry as a substitute for mothers' milk.

The early 1970s thus saw the beginning of an international campaign to stop the inappropriate promotion of breast-milk substitutes, particularly where poverty, unavailability of potable water and illiteracy prevail. UN agencies have joined with NGOs in a worldwide effort to encourage breast-feeding of both girls and boys.

- In 1981, the World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes — the code calls for broad restrictions on certain practices, including a ban on advertising of breast-milk substitutes to the public and their promotion in health-care systems.

- In 1991, UNICEF and WHO launched the "baby-friendly hospital initiative", which encourages hospitals to adopt practices that support breast-feeding. To date, this is supported by 144 nations. [4]

Women and girls often have a secondary place in the nutritional priorities of families, especially in developing countries and in areas of extreme poverty.

Though nutritional equality between boys and girls was recognized as a critical concern at

the **International Conference on Nutrition** in Rome in 1992, girls often suffer disproportionately from malnutrition, especially when prevailing customs or beliefs sanction preference for boys.

In some countries, a bias in favour of males determines nutritional intake. In areas where a preference for sons is strong, girls get a smaller percentage of their food needs satisfied than do boys. Boys also tend to get the more nutritious food.

- The typical girl in these countries, according to UNICEF's *1989 Annual Report*, receives 20 per cent fewer calories than her brother and is more likely to be malnourished.

- In one region of India, girls were four times more likely than boys to suffer from acute malnutrition, and 40 times less likely to be taken to hospital. [5]

Malnutrition of female children under the age of five often contributes to their morbidity and mortality from a variety of infections and chronic diseases. Stunted growth caused by protein-energy deficiency in girls is responsible for subsequent problems in childbirth. Malnourished mothers tend to give birth to underweight babies, who, malnourished in the womb, are likely to remain so in the crucial years of early childhood development. (See also Chapter Five, sections on female infanticide and gender-selective abortion.)

Basic Health Care and Immunization

The expansion of primary health care has greatly benefited female children and women. Basic health-care and immunization are now increasingly available to them. However, boys still enjoy an advantage.

Boys are taken more often for medical care when they are sick, and more money is spent on doctors' fees and medicine for them.

Health workers in several developing countries have also noticed that when immunizations are offered free, parents get both boys and girls immunized. When a cash fee is charged, then more boys than girls are brought to the clinics to be immunized.

- In the Kanghura Community Health Project in the Republic of Korea, only half as many girls as boys were brought for measles immunization after a small fee was introduced. [6]

ADOLESCENCE

There are many health concerns specific to adolescent girls. Like every growing child, the teenage girl has increased nutritional and health needs. In many cases, these are not adequately met.

- An adolescent girl requires, but rarely gets, 18 per cent more iron per kilogram of body weight than male adolescents. Many adolescent girls suffer from iron deficiency.

- At least 25 per cent of adolescent girls in developing countries are also affected by iodine deficiency. This seriously affects the next generation as iodine deficiency can cause mental retardation and goitre and affects a woman's reproductive functioning, causing brain damage in foetus and in infant.

Teenage Pregnancy

The passage from girlhood to womanhood marks the beginning of concerns connected to a woman's biological role in reproduction. Sexual maturity in females has always provoked

greater concern than that of males because of the possibility of pregnancy, and, in many cultures, because of the value attached to virginity as a bridal asset. [7]

In many developing countries, women marry at a very young age — around 50 per cent of African women, 40 per cent of Asian women and 30 per cent of Latin American women are married by the age of 18, according to the **World Fertility Survey**. Child-bearing for them also starts early. [8]

Teenage pregnancy is not limited to the developing world. In fact, early child-bearing is a growing trend in several developed countries. It is cause for great concern in industrialized countries because it is increasingly taking place outside of the institution of marriage. These teenage parents are often unable to establish an equal partnership and stable relationship, with negative consequences for them and their children.

- In the United States, for example, more than two-thirds of births to adolescent mothers now occur outside of marriage, compared to one-third in 1970 [9]; and 30 per cent of all teenage pregnancies end in abortion, while in Norway, a staggering 87.5 per cent of pregnancies of girls under 18 are aborted. [10]
- Aside from the medical and health problems, pregnancy outside marriage puts increased pressure on the young girl who has few, if any, social systems to help her cope with the pregnancy and, later on, with the child. As a result, many choose the option of abortion.
- At least one million and as many as 4.4 million adolescent women have abortions in developing countries each year — most performed illegally and under unsafe conditions. [11]
- Worldwide, nearly 15 million teenage women give birth each year, accounting for up to 10 per cent of all births globally.
- More than 80 per cent of teenage mothers are in developing countries.
- In **Africa,** 50 per cent of women have given birth by age 20, compared to 35 per cent in **Latin America and the Caribbean** and 30 per cent in **Asia.** [12]
- While in **North America,** almost 15 per cent of all births occur to women under the age of 20, in **Europe** it varies with more than seven per cent for northern Europe, 12 per cent for eastern Europe, six per cent for southern Europe and nearly four per cent for western Europe. [13]
- In general the annual number of births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 in the more developed regions is 32, the less developed regions is 65 and the least developed countries is 140. [14]

These "children having children" are physically and emotionally immature for child-bearing and rearing. Medical evidence confirms that women who give birth before the age of 20 suffer more complications during birth than women aged 20 to 35 and thus have higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates.

- One quarter of the 500,000 women who die every year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth are teenagers. [15]
- Teenage mothers suffer more pregnancy and delivery complications including toxemia, iron-deficiency anaemia, premature delivery, prolonged and obstructed labour, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy and even death.

Similarly, the children born to young mothers are at increased risk of mortality and morbidity — often suffering low birth weight that leads to infant death and conditions such as cerebral palsy, autism and learning disabilities.

Current research demonstrates that if adequate prenatal and postnatal care are given to these young mothers and social support, the health risk to them and their children is reduced. There is also evidence that teenage pregnancy often repeats itself in generational cycles. Daughters of teenage mothers are more likely to be teenage mothers themselves.

- In the Philippines, interviews with 108 teenage mothers found that 60 per cent of their mothers were under age 20 at their first birth. [16]
- Similarly in the United States, daughters of teenage mothers are between one-third and two times more likely to be adolescent mothers than are daughters of older mothers. [17]

There are also social consequences of early childbearing. Teenage pregnant girls may face expulsion from school, a lack of career opportunities, low wages, increased welfare dependency and social ostracism.

Some countries in Africa, however, have reversed their policy of expelling pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers. In Kenya, for example, the Government reversed its expulsion policy in 1994 and launched a new programme for girls who drop out of school because of pregnancy and early motherhood.

Even where not mandatory, most girls drop out to work to support their children because they lack support services that would enable them to stay in school and take care of their children.

The **Programme of Action** adopted at the **International Conference on Population and Development** in Cairo in September 1994 acknowledges that the reproductive health needs of adolescents as a group have been largely ignored to date. The Programme thus specifies one of its objectives as being:

> *To address adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues, including unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS through the promotion of responsible and healthy reproductive and sexual behaviour, including voluntary abstinence, and the provision of appropriate services and counselling specifically suitable for that age group.*

The **Cairo Programme of Action** asks Governments and NGOs to establish educational programmes and health services to address adolescent reproductive needs. Among successful adolescent outreach programmes are:

- **Gente Joven** (Young People), an adolescent programme in urban areas of Mexico. Launched in 1986 by MEXFAM, Mexico's largest private family-planning provider, the programme uses a decentralized, community-based approach, and youth promoters for outreach activities. It has services in 42 cities and towns, reaching a population of 350,000 teenagers. Since its inception, the programme, which was developed to improve sex education and family-planning service delivery for teens, has distributed two million condoms and conducted several educational programmes using radio and a soap-opera format video series;

- The **Health Agents Program** operates in the slums of Recife in Brazil. One of the programmes of Casa de Passagem, an NGO in Brazil is the Health Agents Program begun in 1989 training young girls in the slums to become "community health agents", who counsel their peers on a variety of health issues, including family planning, early pregnancy, AIDS education and their basic rights as women. The chief activities include individual and group peer counselling, condom distribution, health prevention presentations and health theatre.

ADULT WOMEN

The health of women in the years from 15 to 45 is predominantly influenced by their reproductive and maternal roles.

This is also the period when women are more likely to suffer from illnesses related to their reproductive roles such as sexually transmitted diseases, anaemia, and complications resulting from childbearing.

Globally, 51 per cent of pregnant women and a third of women of reproductive age who are not pregnant are anaemic. This causes fatigue, reduces productivity and lowers their resistance to disease. In pregnancy and childbirth, it means greater risk for the life and health of both mother and child.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), the Nairobi Conference on Women in 1985, the Mexico Population Conference in 1984 and the Cairo Population Conference in 1994, all brought the world's attention to the issue of women's reproductive health problems.

The **Global Commission on Women's Health** considers reproductive health as referring to all aspects of well-being related to the reproductive system throughout the life cycle. It encompasses fertility, infertility and the enjoyment of sexual health without fear of disease or unwanted pregnancy.

Women's reproductive health was one of the central themes at the **1994 Cairo World Conference on Population and Development**. Its Programme of Action clearly states that all countries should strive to make reproductive health care — including family-planning counselling, information, education, services for prenatal care, safe delivery and postnatal care — accessible to all through the primary health-care system.

Reproductive health-care programmes must involve women in the leadership, planning, decision-making, management, implementation, organization and evaluation of services. Community participation in reproductive health-care services should also be promoted by decentralizing the management of public-health programmes.

Reproductive Rights

The **Cairo Programme of Action**, adopted in 1994, affirms that reproductive rights are basic rights for all couples and individuals:

- To decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children;
- To have the information and means to do so;
- To be able to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health;

- To make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

For a long time, health and development planners have tended to see women primarily in context of their reproductive role. Thus solutions to women's health needs has by and large been restricted to expansion and improvement of maternal and child health systems. Even that has often not been adequate.

Women are increasingly seen today as people possessing reproductive rights, among other human rights. These include:

- The right to safe motherhood;
- The right to plan one's family and have access to full and timely knowledge about all aspects of reproductive health and sexuality.

Safe Motherhood

> *The fact that 1,500 women are being allowed to die each and every day of each and every year from 'maternal causes' is one of the least-protested scandals of the late 20th century.*
>
> — UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1995*

- Every year, approximately half a million women die from causes related to pregnancy, abortion and childbirth.
- According to UNICEF estimates, at least 70,000 of those women die as a result of illegal and unsafe abortions.
- The gap in maternal mortality between developed and developing regions is extremely wide. For at least 99 per cent of maternal mortality cases are in developing countries. Here, maternal mortality is responsible for one-fourth to one-third of all deaths of women of child-bearing age.
- Besides these, there are several thousand more women who survive pregnancy and childbirth but remain scarred from the experience with injuries, diseases and disabilities.

The death of a mother has dramatic consequences on the family, especially the young children she leaves behind. When a mother dies, it doubles the death rate of her surviving sons and quadruples that of her daughters.

> *In contrast to the dramatic decline in infant mortality rates in recent years, there has been no significant reduction in maternal mortality rates in the past two decades.*
>
> — Dr. A. Petros-Barvazian, Report to a Workshop on Women's Health, at the meeting of the Task Force on Child Survival, March 1990 [18]

As Sue Armstrong and Erica Royston write in the introduction to their book, *Preventing Maternal Deaths*:

> *... maternal death and injury in developing countries ... is a tragedy that has been largely ignored by those who set national and international health priorities, because those who suffer generally live in remote places, are poor, illiterate and politically powerless.* [19]

The great majority of those deaths can be prevented by a combination of:

- Improved family-planning services;
- A wider awareness of the need for immediate hospitalization if problems arise; and
- More training of district-level hospital staff to provide emergency obstetric care (including Caesarean section).

To respond to the high rates of maternal mortality, the **Safe Motherhood Initiative** was launched in February 1987 at a conference in Nairobi co-sponsored by WHO, the World Bank and UNFPA, with support from UNICEF and UNDP. These agencies are now partners in the initiative along with many NGOs and bilateral aid agencies.

The Initiative identified the underlying causes of women's death in childbirth as the lack of proper prenatal care, having too many children, fear of going to the hospital or using contraception, illicit and unsafe abortions, and malnourishment among others.

Maternal care can save lives. Sri Lanka, for example, has the same per capita GNP as Pakistan, but a maternal mortality rate that is one fifth of Pakistan's. WHO attributes this to the fact that almost all births in Sri Lanka are attended by trained personnel, the availability of good family-planning services and high female literacy. [20]

At its inception, the Safe Motherhood Initiative called for political commitment to reallocate priorities and resources to implement the available strategies that can reduce maternal mortality. The need for a comprehensive, multisectoral approach was stressed.

One of the most successful strategies used to reduce maternal mortality has been the involvement of **traditional birth attendants (TBAs)** in the process.

- In southern Ethiopia, the Government and an NGO are working together in a district with TBAs, training them in primary health care and visiting them once a month. TBAs are given the responsibility of identifying all the pregnant women in their village and deciding which of those are at risk of a complicated delivery and at what stage should be transported to a hospital. For emergencies, a system of village messenger is used to alert the local primary-health-care clinic. [21]

Family Planning

Family planning involves an array of services to help couples have the number of children they want, when they want them. It includes helping infertile couples as well.

Access to contraception is essential. Globally, 57 per cent of couples, where the wife is of reproductive age, use contraception — **nearly a fivefold increase in contraceptive use since the 1960s**.

Much of the decline in average fertility rates for developing countries can be attributed to national family-planning programmes.

Government backing for family-planning programmes has increased in recent years. Between 1976 and 1988, the number of Governments providing direct support for family planning rose from 97 to 125; Governments limiting access to family planning fell from 15 to seven. [22]

Survey data shows that about 120 million women in the developing world who are currently not using family planning say they want to avoid pregnancy and would use a family-planning method if information and services were available and their family and community were supportive. [23]

In developed countries, most women have access to a variety of contraceptive methods. According to recent surveys, in France three per cent of married women were at risk of an undesired pregnancy because they were not using contraception; in the United Kingdom three to five per cent; and the United States four per cent. The level was higher in the countries in transition — in the Czech Republic 13-15 per cent, Hungary 10 per cent and Romania 10-12 per cent. It is, however, important to note that such figures tend to understate the number of women with an "unmet need" for family planning, because they only take account of married women and not of women who are sexually active but not married. [24]

When there is no access to effective methods of contraception, women frequently resort to dangerous, illegal abortions in order to control their fertility. Illegal abortion kills up to 100,000 women a year in developing countries and permanently injures the health of countless more. [25]

Thus the Cairo Programme of Action saw the need for effective and safe family-planning programmes:

> *All countries should take steps to meet the family-planning needs of their populations as soon as possible and should, in all cases by the year 2015, seek to provide universal access to a full range of safe and reliable family-planning methods.*

The Programme of Action also emphasizes men sharing responsibility and actively involving themselves in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behaviour, including family-planning; prenatal, maternal and child health.

An example of a successful family-planning programme is **PROFAMILIA** in Colombia, which is responsible for approximately 65 per cent of all family-planning activity in that country. It not only offers family-planning services, but assistance in reproductive health and women's empowerment issues. It has developed innovative programmes that include legal services for women and gender-training workshops as part of the family-planning service delivery. It also conducts workshops on gender issues and analysis for physicians and health personnel.

Contraceptive Choices

The key to improving the quality of family-planning services is a broadening of contraceptive choices. Several modern methods have some undesirable side-effects. There is thus need for more research into better contraceptive technology.

The proper use of many techniques such as Norplant and IUDs requires a good health-care infrastructure, which simply does not exist in many developing countries, particularly in rural areas.

According to Dr. Mahmoud F. Fathalla, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Assuit University in Egypt, contraceptives are meant to empower women and to enable them to maximize their choices, to control their fertility, their sexuality, their health and their lives.

The modern contraceptive revolution was driven largely by policies aimed at lowering the fertility rates and though women benefited, they were not at the centre of the process. This has led to women's concerns about the use of technology to control rather than empower them; about safety issues of contraception and the greater burden of family planning on women as compared with men. [26]

Dr. Fathalla suggests that there is a need for a second contraceptive technology revolution for the 21st century, what he terms, **"contraception-21 initiative"**, driven by women's needs

and perspectives. In both industrialized and developing regions, the greater burden of responsibility for contraception on women is a concern that needs to be addressed.

Cancer

Cancer is one of the leading causes of mortality in women both in the developed and developing countries, especially for those aged 35-55. However, early detection and screening can reduce cancer risks.

The malignant tumours affecting adult women most frequently are breast, cervical, colorectal and stomach cancer. While cancer of the cervix is the most common cancer in developing countries, breast cancer is most frequent in women in industrialized countries. [27]

- At present there are half a million new cases of cervical cancer a year. [28]
- Breast cancer takes the lives of at least 300,000 women each year and it is estimated that 700,000 or more new cases occur each year. This cancer is predominantly found in North America and northern Europe. The probability of developing breast cancer between birth and the age of 75 varies from 1 to 12 per cent depending on the country of residence. The lowest rates are observed in Africa and the highest are among Caucasian women in the US. [29]

Substance Abuse

Smoking currently kills over half a million women each year in the industrialized world. Not only does smoking cause an increase in lung cancer and cardiovascular diseases, it also affects women's health in ways that are specific to women alone, putting them at added risk.

- Women smokers have higher rates of cervical cancer.
- Those who smoke and use the oral contraceptive pill are several times more likely to develop cardiovascular diseases than those who use neither.
- Smoking also affects women's reproductive health, increasing the risks of earlier menopause, miscarriage and low birthweight babies. [30]

Unfortunately, among young women in many countries, the proportion of smokers is rising most rapidly, even as it is decreasing among young men. [31]

Alcohol use among women has also risen.

- Research shows that women are more sensitive than men to alcohol. A woman absorbs more of the alcohol she drinks into her bloodstream due to a biochemical difference in the stomach lining.
- In the US, where alcohol abuse is a serious public health problem, studies have shown that the average alcohol-dependent woman had her life-span shortened by more than 15 years. [32]
- In general, women who drink heavily are more likely than men to develop cirrhosis of the liver.
- Socially, women alcoholics tend to become totally isolated.

Women and girls in fairly large numbers are also users of **psychotropic drugs** such as marijuana, hashish, cocaine, crack-cocaine, heroin and LSD. In addition to all the well-known health risks associated with them, women have further risks associated with drugs.

- Those who use drugs during pregnancy, especially crack-cocaine, run the risk of producing infants with serious birth defects. "Crack babies" suffer withdrawal symptoms after birth, and a high percentage are victims of permanent damage, including physical and sensory problems, learning disabilities and personality disorders.

Increasingly, women's health networks, largely in developed countries, are now expressing concern over the use of legally prescribed psychotropic drugs — minor tranquillizers and other benzodiazepines that have a sedative effect on the brain — among women. Doctors tend to prescribe such drugs more for women than men, even when both report similar psychological symptoms. [33]

STDs and AIDS

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and reproductive-tract infections affect women in all walks of life, and they often suffer unnecessarily due to lack of access to appropriate care, poor nutrition and adverse living conditions.

The impact of STDs are severe on young women, since infections have few symptoms and may go untreated.

- An estimated 250 million sexually transmitted infections occur each year with complications including pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, pelvic pain and life-threatening ectopic pregnancy.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has emerged as a major health problem since the mid-1980s for women. A decade ago, women seemed to be on the periphery of the AIDS epidemic, but today almost half of the newly infected adults are women. [34]

According to the Global Commission on Women's Health:

- Every minute worldwide, two women become infected by HIV;
- Every two minutes a woman dies from AIDS;
- More than one million women were infected by HIV in 1993 alone;
- AIDS has become the main cause of death among women as well as men aged 20-40 years in some major cities of the Americas, Europe and sub-Saharan Africa; [35]
- By the year 2000, WHO estimates that over 13 million women will have been infected with HIV and about four million of them will have died;
- Women appear biologically more vulnerable to the HIV infection. Transmission of HIV from men to women is as much as two to ten times more likely than from women to men.

AIDS has serious and often painful implications for women in their role as actual or potential mothers.

- A woman with AIDS will be hindered by ill health in looking after her children.
- As infections among women rise, so do infections in the infants born to them. A woman infected with HIV runs the risk of passing on the infection to her infant. Evidence suggests that between 25 and 40 per cent of infants born to HIV-infected mothers will be infected. Most of these children will die before they are five.

AIDS also presents problems for women who are not HIV-infected themselves but have to care for someone in their family — a spouse, child or sibling — who is infected. As care-

providers for long periods of time, these women have to suffer physical, mental and emotional stress from watching a loved one, often in the prime of life, weaken and die. [36]

Violence and Health

The consequence of violence against women has been increasingly recognized as a health-related issue. (Refer to Chapter Five for the presentation on violence against women.)

Violence against women leads to psychological trauma, depression, substance abuse, injuries, STDs, HIV infection, suicide and murder.

Based on limited data, the World Bank estimates that in the industrialized countries, rape and domestic violence account for almost one in every five healthy years of life lost to women aged 15 to 44. [37]

There is also the inter-generational effect. Some experts claim that children who have been physically or sexually abused or grown up in families where they have witnessed domestic violence are more likely to be abusive themselves as adults.

NGOs have played an important role in informing women about their human rights (which include the right to be protected from violence); in providing them refuge from such violence, and in supporting them in their claims before the courts.

ELDERLY WOMEN

As life expectancy increases around the globe, it is estimated that **the number of women over 65 will increase from 330 million in 1990 to 600 million in 2015**, a trend that requires greater attention by policy makers and governments in both developed and developing countries.

Many of these elderly women would have faced poor nutrition, reproductive ill-health, dangerous working conditions, violence and lifestyle-related diseases (heart disease and obesity, for example), all of which exacerbate the post-menopausal phenomenon of increased likelihood of breast and cervical cancers and osteoporosis.

In urbanized and industrialized societies, older women also have to face neglect, poverty, loneliness and alienation from their families.

- Only two per cent of those aged 60 and over in Fiji, Korea and the Philippines live apart from their families. Nearly a third of elderly Americans, however, live alone and nearly half of those aged 75 and over do so. In the United Kingdom, 80 per cent of elderly people living alone are women. [38]

However, in many parts of the world, older women are organizing themselves.

- The **Women's Initiative** within the **American Association of Retired Persons** sponsors the Women's Health Advocacy Project, which publishes information that encourages older women to maintain healthy lifestyles and attitudes.
- **HelpAge International,** a federation of national organizations of the elderly, supports projects for older women in developing countries and publishes a newsletter with practical tips for the elderly on how to preserve their health and make everyday life easier for themselves.

OBSTACLES, TRENDS AND GOALS

The World Health Organization's goal of **Health for All by the Year 2000** has helped promote a reorientation of global health strategies by drawing attention to fundamental issues of access to and equity in health.

In the two decades since the first women's conference in Mexico City, some strides have been made in ensuring that women get equal benefits from health systems.

- Women have benefited from primary health care with its emphasis on improving health through intersectoral activities in areas such as nutrition, water, sanitation and education, in addition to basic health services.
- More information is now available on women's health issues and concerns.

However, the data on women worldwide shows clearly the disparities that still exist in health. Not just disparities between women and men, but between regions, between countries, and between different socio-economic, ethnic and age groups within a country.

Providing women easy accessibility to health care — whether it is in locating a primary health-care centre closer to a woman's home, having transport available to reach that centre when the need arises, keeping the cost of the health care low or staffing medical centres with female health workers — is one of the keys to bridging those disparities.

Increasing economic pressures and implementation of structural adjustment policies are, however, forcing many countries to cut public health spending. This has detrimental effects particularly on marginal populations, although more recent programmes are attempting to safeguard spending on social services such as health.

National and international health policies have to take into account the specific needs of women.

The **Cairo Population Conference**, where reproductive rights and women's health issues took centre stage, was a major step forward. It underscored the fact that women are critical to success of population programmes and favoured the approach of looking at them as active participants of family-planning programmes. There seemed to be a consensus that the population issue revolves around women having greater control of their own lives, including their own fertility.

However, setting an agenda for women's health must firstly begin with a recognition that not only are women's health needs different than men's, but also that the systems that identify and determine that health need are fashioned by gender-biased models. Gender discrimination tends to be hidden within the general issue of poverty and underdevelopment. [39]

Lack of Research on Women's Health

Women's illnesses — or conditions like menopause that affect only women — have often been neglected by medical research. Some, like breast cancer, only recently have begun to receive attention after women's groups and the women's media raised the question again and again.

While the positive side is that a feminization of medicine is taking place — more women are taking up roles of scientific researchers, doctors and medical staff — this by itself is no guarantee that they will advance women's health concerns. It does, however, set the stage for a better and broader understanding of such issues.

Experts recognize the need for gender-specific drug testing as well as the need to foster

research on women's health — especially on prevention, treatment and health-care systems for diseases and conditions that affect women and girls differently.

Health Consequences of Violence

In conclusion, it is essential to view women's health in a holistic way within the social, economic and political context of their lives.

There has also been a tendency to deal with women's health-care needs through separate programmes related to particular health issues. Here too, a holistic view is necessary as the well-being of a woman in each stage of her life is dependent on her past well-being. Similarly, the fate of future healthy generations also depends on the women of today.

Women will only enjoy the right to health once progress is finally made in overcoming barriers to equality and choice. The **Global Commission on Women's Health** uses the term **"health security"** to describe this right. Health security traces the entire life cycle of a woman from *in utero* through to old age and encompasses all aspects of the basic human right to health.

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Women and Education

The past 30 years have witnessed dramatic advances in education worldwide. Overall, student enrolment has increased, spending on basic education has grown, national and international actions have been taken to raise literacy levels. In most developed regions and in a growing number of developing countries near universal literacy for young people has been achieved.

Women have benefited from this so-called "quiet revolution." Today, more girls and women are entering school. In some countries, such as Qatar, Dominica and Lesotho, there are more women than men enrolled in higher education.

Despite this progress, years of neglect have left very high illiteracy rates among adult, especially rural, women in many developing countries. Huge gaps also exist in women's educational achievements, as in science and technology, for example.

Women and girls in both developed and developing countries still do not have equal access to education and training resources.

It is clear that education:

- Has a major impact on social change; and
- Is an investment that pays significant dividends in economic growth, improved health and quality of life for women and men alike.

As citizens, community leaders and mothers, women have emerged as major agents of social progress; their education is critical to sustain this momentum.

In most parts of the world, girls and boys now have the same access to schooling; in some regions, equality in enrolment is being achieved in tertiary education. Yet some imbalances persist.

- Of the world's nearly one billion illiterates, two thirds are women.
- Of the 130 million children without access to primary education, more than 80 million are girls.
- On average, by the age of 18, girls have received 4.4 years less education than boys.[1]

Economic crises and government budget cuts hurt girls more than boys. Faced with hardship, families in some societies keep sons rather than daughters in school — because of the male's expected role as breadwinner — no matter which child has shown greater aptitude or achievement. This raises new challenges:

For girls entering school: How to keep them there and insure quality education that prepares them to enter any field, exposes them to science and technology, stimulates their creativity and fosters their self-esteem;

For adult women: Providing education and training to help them overcome the consequences of past discrimination that leave them lacking in essential skills.

EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT

The right of every individual to education is one of the first provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. But education is often neglected in societies struggling to meet the many needs of their people. Only recently has education received greater priority as planners finally recognized it is a key factor in determining the pace of development. [2]

Creating educational opportunities for girls and women is strongly emphasized in the work of the UN. Supplementing the 1960 UNESCO **Convention Against Discrimination**, Article 10 of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, in 1979, outlined a comprehensive agenda for promoting gender equality in education. Its provisions require that societies:

- Provide women access to the same curricula, examinations, and quality teaching staff as boys;
- Eliminate any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women, by revising textbooks and school programmes and adapting teaching methods to the needs of girls;
- Offer the same opportunities for career and vocational guidance and for scholarships and study grants;
- Promote the active participation of girls in sports and physical education.

The Convention, which is aimed at narrowing the gender gap in education, recommends:

- Making available the same opportunities in programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes;
- Reducing female drop-out rates, and organizing programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely.

Echoing principles from the 1968 Teheran Declaration on Human Rights produced by the First World Conference on Human Rights, CEDAW includes a provision that sparked controversy at the 1994 **World Conference on Population and Development** in Cairo:

- Access to specific educational information to help ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

Early marriage and child-bearing are major factors cutting short the education of girls and women. Thus, UNICEF's 1989 **Convention on the Rights of the Child** called for national legislation that sets 18 as the minimum age for marriage.

TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL

The **World Conference on Education for All**, sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and the UNDP and held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, took stock of the persistence and dimensions of the gender gap. Looking to the year 2000, its Final Declaration stated:

- "The most urgent priority" is guaranteeing access to, and improving the quality of, education for girls and women. This means eliminating all obstacles to their active participation. Specifically, "all gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated" (Article 1);
- Focusing on skills that are actually learned rather than years of schooling completed, the Declaration recommends "active and participatory approaches", such as problem-solving and learning by doing, to counter the image of passivity to which girls are often expected to conform (Article 4);
- Drawing attention to poor environments experienced by hundreds of millions of girls, it calls for ensuring "that all learners receive the nutrition, health care, and general physical and emotional support they need" (Article 6).

THE GENDER GAP BY REGION

The recession of the 1980s led to cuts in education budgets worldwide, particularly in developing countries where economic recession and structural adjustment programmes constricted social spending. However, generally this did not affect rates of female school enrolment which increased worldwide at all levels. But gross enrolment rates mask certain vital measurements of genuine progress:

- The number of students who stay in school;
- The number promoted to the next grade;
- The number who complete each school cycle.

Rarely are these factors measured systematically.

- In **Africa**, the average percentage of girls to boys in primary education rose to 79 per cent in 1990 from 65 per cent in 1970; in secondary education to 69 per cent from 46 per cent; and in higher education to 32 per cent from 20 per cent — the largest gains of any region. [3]
- **However, in places where girls' primary enrolment reached parity with those of boys — such as in Cameroon, Congo, Senegal, Swaziland and Tanzania — or surpassed the rates of boys (as in Botswana and Lesotho), high drop-out rates in secondary schools tend to offset the gains. In many countries of the region, early marriage and pregnancy keep 80 to 90 per cent of adolescent girls out of high school.** [4]
- In **Asia and the Pacific**, the average percentage of girls to boys in primary education increased to 84 per cent in 1990 from 66 per cent in 1970; in secondary education to 77 per cent from 58 per cent; and in higher education to 84 per cent from 46 per cent. [5]
- In **South Asia**, where dowry traditions keep many girls from furthering their education beyond the primary level, some bridegrooms' parents are beginning to accept the higher educational levels of prospective daughters-in-law as an important element of dowry, in part because of education's increasing prestige, and because it may translate into higher earning power for the household. [6]
- Throughout most of **South Asia**, however, in 1990, girls spent on average only 1.26 years in school, an increase of only 0.10 per cent over a decade. [7]

- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the average ratio of girls to boys in primary education rose only to 95 per cent in 1990 from 94 per cent in 1970. The average ratio of girls to boys in secondary education rose to 109 per cent in 1990 from 98 per cent in 1970 and in higher education, it rose to 106 per cent from 72. [8]
- Drop-out rates for girls in rural areas are often twice as high as in towns and cities, especially in the poorest countries of the region. In Haiti, only two per cent of rural girls complete high school, compared to 25 per cent in urban areas. [9]
- Adolescent pregnancy, a major cause of school drop-out, is rising steeply; in Venezuela, pregnancies among under-15 girls increased 32 per cent during the 1980s; in the Caribbean, 60 per cent of first babies were born to teenagers. [10]
- In **Eastern Europe**, the average ratio of girls to boys in primary education rose to 96 per cent in 1990 from 94 per cent in 1970; in secondary education, however, it decreased from 97 per cent in 1970 to 94 per cent in 1990, while in higher education it rose to 104 per cent from 78 per cent in the same period. [11]
- In **Western Europe and North America**, the average ratio of girls to boys in primary education remained at a steady 95 per cent from 1970 to 1990. It rose in secondary education to 98 per cent in 1990 from 90 per cent in 1970 and, at the tertiary level, to 94 per cent from 53 per cent, largely because the job market increasingly requires higher academic credentials. [12]

REDRESSING ILLITERACY

> *Literacy properly understood is not only an initiation in the three R's, but also an apprenticeship in coping with the modern world.*
>
> — Colin Power, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, January 1990 speech launching International Literacy Year

High drop-out rates in the early primary school years are a major cause of illiteracy among women. Although the gender literacy gap has narrowed since 1970, female illiteracy still constitutes a severe barrier to national and personal development in many countries.

The data collected in the 1990 census rounds revealed that: [13]

- In **Africa**, 61 per cent of the women are illiterate, as compared to 45 per cent of the men.
- In **Asia and the Pacific**, 34 per cent of women are illiterate, compared to 22 per cent of the male population.
- In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, 16 per cent of the female population are illiterate, as compared to 14 per cent of the male population.
- **Eastern Europe** showed the lowest illiteracy rates: 2.3 per cent for women and 0.9 per cent for men.
- In **Western Europe and North America**, 10 per cent of women and 9 per cent of men are illiterate.

Investing in literacy campaigns for women pays off. Even where rudimentary literacy facilities are available, girls and women tend to make greater use of them than do men, often making time for learning despite work pressures.

- In Senegal, adolescent girls attend literacy classes after working 13-hour days.
- In Guatemala, working girls and women attend literacy classes on Sundays after working a six-day week. [14]
- In Egypt, overall illiteracy in urban areas remained constant for men between 1976 and 1986, while it dropped by 9. 5 per cent for women during the same period. [15]
- In Cuba, where mass literacy campaigns have been carried out since the 1960s, less than two per cent of girls and women over the age of 10 are unable to read and write.[16]

The most successful literacy programmes for women combine income-generating skills and reading materials relevant to the students' lives.

- In Togo, 520 centres set up with help from UNESCO combined literacy instruction in local languages with the manufacture of soap and palm oil, and vital agricultural training. The project also trained local writers, including some of the students, to establish newspapers or contribute to existing ones with articles on the concerns of women from different linguistic areas.[17]
- In Indonesia, newly literate women are eligible for government loans of approximately $240 to set up their own small businesses. [18]

RETURNS ON FEMALE EDUCATION

If you are to plan for one year, you plant rice; if you are planning for five years, you plant trees; if you are planning for a generation and the future, you educate your children.

Had this old Chinese proverb substituted "girls" for "children", it would have anticipated a 1993 World Bank study, which demonstrated that education of girls is one of the most rewarding investments a nation can make. [19] Not only does it contribute to overall development, it also raises income, promotes health and increases productivity.

Among the many high returns of female education are:

Higher Productivity

Few will dispute that educating women has great social benefits. But it has enormous economic advantages as well . . . The wages of female workers rise by 10 to 20 per cent for each additional year of schooling. Returns of this magnitude are impressive by the standard of other available investments, but they are just the beginning . . .

— Laurence Summers, 1992, as Chief Economist at the World Bank [20]

Educated women are more productive both at home and in the workplace. A World Bank global study showed that nations that had invested heavily in female primary education benefited through higher economic productivity.

Smaller Families

Over the long term, the single most effective and enduring way of reducing population growth, even more than by the diffusion of contraception, is by giving women more and better education.

— *The Economist*, 3 September 1994

Educated women tend to have fewer children, slowing population growth. A woman with at least seven years of education has 2.2 fewer children than a woman with no schooling. [21]

Uneducated mothers in Brazil have on average 6.5 children, those who have completed high school 2.5. [22]

Better Family Nutrition and Health

> *Mothers' education may be even more important to her children's health than flush toilets or piped water.*
>
> — Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund

An educated mother can raise a healthier family. She not only knows about nutrition, but may have learned how to respond to health-related emergencies.

Every year of a mother's schooling leads to a decrease of up to nine per cent in the mortality rate of under-five children. [23]

Enhanced Learning for Children

> *The family is "the world's smallest school". . . Most [pre-adolescent] children in developing countries spend more time . . . with their mothers than with any other educational "medium", including school.*
>
> — UNESCO's 1993 *World Education Survey*

In fact it has been noticed that when women are educated, they tend to encourage their children to become educated as well.

Enhanced Social Status for Women

> *An educated woman almost always has more value and status in the eyes of her husband, her family and her community. She is more likely to share in family decisions about how many children to have, how to bring them up, how to spend money, how to organize domestic life.*
>
> — Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Educated women tend to make more independent decisions and stand up for themselves. But for poor families the costs of girls' education can be high. They include:

Direct expenses — tuition, books, clothing, shoes, transportation;

Opportunity costs — lost work by daughters in the household or the marketplace, as well as lost time for training them in traditional crafts and skills that add to household income or contribute to the duties expected of a wife and mother;

Cultural costs — of defying society's standards of acceptable female behaviour. In several societies, women's education is equated with women becoming independent-minded. This is considered unacceptable behaviour for women. As an African male educator at a UNICEF conference said, "Women who talk back to men stay unmarried." [24]

OLD OBSTACLES, NEW APPROACHES

Many countries striving to increase and improve the education of girls have been able to counter traditional barriers with innovative programmes.

Educating Parents to the Benefits of Educating Daughters

> *Because of cultural and labour market restrictions on women's work . . . the private benefits to the family that pays for a daughter's education are often not large enough to offset the costs. Unless parents see and appreciate the benefits of educating daughters, they will not be willing to pay the economic costs or the costs of defying cultural norms.*
>
> — Elizabeth M. King, *Educating Girls and Women: Investing in Development*

- In Mali since 1989, media campaigns have been the crux of a "social marketing" effort to promote the education of girls as an investment. [25]
- Morocco launched a successful programme in 1989 in which extension workers visit rural communities to encourage local participation in building and maintaining schools; and distribute materials that illustrate the benefits of educating daughters. [26]
- Throughout **South Asia**, a UNICEF-initiated, multi-media campaign projects an empowering view of a little girl named Meena as a problem-solver in health and nutrition. She even resists parental pressure to drop out of school and marry early. Through television programmes, video cassettes and comic books, the Meena Initiative targets both parents and children in an effort to change the image of girls as passive, dependent victims of prejudice and poverty. [27]

Enhancing the Early Learning Environment

By the time they have reached school age, girls and boys have usually internalized knowledge consistent with social expectations of their gender roles. Pre-school educational programmes can significantly reduce such differences.

- During the 1980s, China established sibling-care facilities at primary schools to release girls from babysitting duties that interfered with their education. The facilities also provide equal preschool learning opportunities for their younger sisters and brothers. [28]
- In Colombia, the PROMESA programme was launched in four poor coastal villages. Educators worked with mothers in the home to enhance their educational relationships with their children, designing games and other devices to spur learning. These mothers then trained others in 10 more villages to give all their children a head start for school. The programme also improved malaria control and other health conditions in the area. [29]

Broadening School Access

- Throughout **Africa** and **Asia,** girls shoulder adult responsibilities, notably sibling care, as early as the age of six.
- In India, rural girls work an average nine hours a day, 315 days a year. [30]
- In Peru, seven to 14-year-old girls work more than twice as many hours as their brothers. [31]

In rural areas of virtually all developing countries — and a few developed ones as well — girls are often barred from education, either because schools are few and far between and their families cannot afford their transport and/or fear for their safety, or because their labour is vitally needed in the household and on the farmstead.

To encourage school attendance for girls, a number of countries have developed innovative programmes that reduce both the direct and the opportunity costs, often by offering informal education.

Using Community Resources

- The **Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee** (BRAC) pioneered a widely replicated scheme in 1985 in which local houses and storerooms serve as classrooms staffed by teachers recruited and trained locally. The parents, largely landless peasants, "invest" in the system by attending monthly meetings to chart progress and discuss improvements. The vast majority of each school's 30 students — 60 to 70 per cent of whom are girls — complete a three-year primary cycle and then move into the formal school system. [32]

Designing Flexible School Schedules

- Colombia launched its *Escuelas Nuevas* (new schools) in 1976 to provide a five-year primary education cycle in poor rural communities where girls' labour in the home and on farmsteads is essential and precludes them from spending six hours in school each day. Girls come when they can to one of more than 15,000 rural schools to study at their own pace with the aid of a teacher assisted by selected student leaders. [33]

Providing Incentives

- A project in Ghana, offering a mid-day meal and take-home rations, found significant increases in enrolment and attendance rates for girls. In addition to their incentive value, such programmes help redress nutritional deficiencies, notably of iodine and iron, common among girls. [34]

- In Guatemala, a project launched in 1987 gave small scholarships to primary-school girls and partially compensated parents for the loss of their daughters' work; textbooks were issued free of charge. The programme also sought to discourage early marriage and childbearing: families of girls who had not become pregnant and attended 75 per cent of classes received an additional monthly payment. [35]

Single-sex Schools

The issue of "separate but equal" all-girls schools and other same-sex facilities generates considerable controversy:

CEDAW suggests "encouraging coeducation" as one way of eliminating the stereotyping of women. Many educators feel that coeducation prepares girls for the obstacles they will face in the working world.

However, evidence from widely different countries shows that girls achieve more in single-sex than coeducational schools, especially in such traditionally male subjects as mathematics and science. [36] Other studies reveal that in mixed classes, teachers devote more time to boys than girls. [37]

Some educators, such as Judith R. Shapiro, President of Barnard College in New York, claim that girls' schools and colleges "are places where girls and women get more attention, more respect and more room to be individuals." [38]

In some cultures in which girls and women are traditionally secluded, parents allow girls to

attend only single-sex schools with female teachers or else withdraw their daughters from coed schools at the onset of puberty.

- In Sudan, Ahfad University, a women's college, sends students into villages as extension workers and literacy instructors. There they identify gifted girls and try to persuade parents that education at a similar institution will not endanger traditional morality. [39]
- In Bangladesh, Kenya, Mali and Pakistan, primary education for girls is conducted in neighbourhood mosques; the presence of the Imam as co-teacher allays parental fears about their daughters' safety. [40]
- Because of solid preparation in single-sex secondary schools, women in several North African and Middle Eastern countries are better represented in both science and engineering studies than in some Western nations: 40 per cent in Egypt; 45 per cent in Turkey; 46 per cent in Jordan. [41]

RECRUITING FEMALE TEACHERS

Increasing the number of female teachers contributes to raising female enrolment. It reduces parental anxiety, and provides role models that encourage students to continue their education.

- Despite numerous studies indicating that women teachers tend to be more sensitive to their girl students, only one third of primary school teachers in developing countries are women, less than one-fourth at the secondary level and only a tenth of those in higher education. [42]
- A programme in Nepal, which trains girls with secondary education as primary school teachers, increased girls' enrolment by 11 per cent. [43]
- Throughout **Africa** and other parts of the developing world, efforts to increase the number of female teachers face numerous difficulties.
- Most women cannot meet the minimum requirement — eight years of education — for teacher training.
- Most training institutes are situated in cities to which rural girls, those most likely to staff rural schools, cannot afford to come.
- Salaries of female teachers are often lower than wages available to semi-skilled labour in growing industries. [44]

COURSE OFFERINGS

The world over, schools usually respond to social pressure for coursework that reinforces traditional roles of women: [45]

- In most **Western** countries, courses in "home economics" or "domestic science" are still offered to girls rather than boys; rarely do both sexes study household management in school.
- In Mali, instruction in child care is an essential part of female education.
- In Jordan, vocational training for girls is largely limited to areas such as nursing and dressmaking, with traditionally high female employment rates.

A balance must be struck between providing courses that help women fulfil traditional roles and at the same time not allowing curricula to lock women out of wider educational opportunities.

— Elizabeth M. King, *Educating Girls and Women: Investing in Development*, World Bank 1990, p. 12

OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES

Schooling for girls and women must overcome stereotypes and equip students with not only the "three Rs", but with knowledge about their legal rights, as well as training appropriate for entering new or traditionally male fields.

- To counter traditional portrayals of women as submissive and dependent within and outside the home, Mexico has made sweeping changes in textbooks and other instructional materials. [46]
- In Nepal's remote mountainous regions, a programme for girls uses course materials based on a female character who confidently overcomes the hardships of rural life. [47]
- An interactive video programme developed by the US Department of Education encourages high school girls to explore traditionally male fields ranging from the construction trade to industrial chemistry.
- The Dutch, French and German Federations of University Women promote the entry of women students in such areas as computer technology and engineering. [48]

TRAINING IN TRADITIONALLY MALE FIELDS

One major obstacle to increasing the number of women in fields dominated by men is the prevalence of male-only training facilities. Recent experience demonstrates the effectiveness of opening up technical fields to women.

- In Pakistan, as recently as 1990, 72 per cent of secondary vocational schools barred women; similarly, in the Dominican Republic, girls could not enrol in three of the major public institutes for middle-level technology. [49]
- By contrast, Morocco's Industrial and Commercial Job Training Programme for Women, launched in 1979, recruited young women with nine years of education — no diploma required — to train in drafting and electronics and placed them in apprenticeships. Many employers continue to request new students. [50]
- Since 1987, vocational schools in Ghana have opened courses in welding, carpentry, masonry and technical drawing to girls, who have earned prizes in these subjects. Conversely, courses in sewing and cooking under such titles as "tailoring" and "food services" cater to increasing numbers of boys. [51]

PROVIDING FAMILY-PLANNING AND SEX EDUCATION

- "Family Life Education" curricula, pioneered in India, Nigeria and the United States, includes information on sexuality and contraception as part of broader teaching in responsible parenthood. [52]

- The Canadian-produced animated cartoon and wordless comic book, *Karate Kids*, is used by Brazilian, Kenyan, Filipino and North American community centres for school drop-outs and street children of both sexes to teach AIDS prevention and other aspects of sexual health. [53]

GIVING TEENAGE MOTHERS A SECOND CHANCE

- In Barbados, the PAREDOS (Parental Education for Development) programme reaches 20 per cent of teenage mothers in Bridgetown, offering remedial instruction, vocational training and counselling. [54]
- Throughout Europe, North America and many Latin American and Caribbean countries, millions of women attend night classes or enrol in correspondence courses after their child-bearing years. They pursue higher education, often in fields closed to females when they were adolescents.

OBSTACLES, TRENDS AND GOALS

It is increasingly understood that education must be combined with other opportunities to overcome the cultural and economic barriers that still relegate women to inferior status in virtually all countries and communities.

> *Education may allow a woman to take the first steps towards self-determination and security. But her society may forbid her from developing her new-found confidence . . . It is as though women are allowed to see the possibilities, but not to translate what they have learned into improvements in their lives.*
>
> — "Literacy: A Key to Empowerment", UN/DPI feature No. 1567 (1994)

Affirmative Action — positive steps to eliminate existing, remedy past, and prevent future discrimination — in support of expanding education for girls and women can greatly increase their empowerment.

- In northern Ghana, villages offer primary-school scholarships to girls. Community involvement has educated parents to the importance of educating girls, thus their enrolment and retention rates have increased by one third. [55]
- Malawi has reserved one-third of its secondary school places for girls.
- Australia links funding to its colleges and universities with their success in increasing the number of women in traditionally male courses and fields of graduate study.
- Sweden aims to achieve attendance of a minimum of 40 per cent of either sex in all educational programmes. [56]

Women Studying Science

Beatrix Potter, the creator of the Peter Rabbit children's books, was the first botanist to catalogue the fungi of the British Isles, but was excluded from all the English scientific societies of her day. [57] Today, male dominance in science and technology is slowly, if grudgingly, giving way to increasing numbers of women graduates.

- During the 1980s, young women constituted 17. 4 per cent of Singapore's engineering students and 10. 3 per cent of its natural science students at the university level. [58]
- More than one third of French students preparing for entry into leading schools in science and technology are women. [59]
- Today, 50 per cent of Hungary's physics professors are women, while 32 per cent of Argentina's astronomy faculties are made up of women. Both are fields that were long dominated by males. [60]
- In 1989, women in the United States received 27.8 per cent of the doctorates awarded in science and engineering, an increase of almost 20 per cent since 1966. This increase is modest in light of strenuous efforts to attract women into science since the 1970s. "We have to look deeply into the culture of science," comments a prominent historian of science, "and see what is turning women off. " [61]

Women's Studies

The problem of low self-esteem is endemic to many women in all societies . . . especially where women's position is legally and economically as a permanent juvenile and dependent . . . As a girl or woman abandons the stereotypes, she also abandons what she knows best, the sense of self with which she and many generations before her were raised.

— NGO Committee on UNICEF, report on 1992 Conference on Education for All Girls: A Human Right, a Social Gain

Programmes of women's studies have attempted to dismantle stereotypes and build up women's self-esteem. Special studies reveal both:

- The extent to which women have been deprived and oppressed, and
- Elements in the traditions of all civilizations that promote positive images and ease the conflicts experienced by many women in pursuit of their advancement and new roles in society.

GOALS TO THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

Two goals are envisioned by the Fourth World Conference on Women for raising the educational status of women:

- Reduction of adult illiteracy to half its 1990 level with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current male/female disparity.
- Universal female access to and completion of primary education.

The two most important measures are:

- Lowering the direct and indirect costs for girls' education;
- Raising public awareness of the need and benefits of educating girls.

What is needed is not a separate and discrete plan of action for girls' education, but an engendering of the current plans, programmes, policies and strategies in ways that improve the prospect of attaining the goal of universal primary education.

— Khadija Haq, World Bank/UNICEF Seminar on Girls' Education, Guilin, China, 1994

Reflecting the emphasis the entire UN organization is placing on the Advancement of Women, UNESCO states in *Women in a Changing Global Economy*, 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development:

> *The success of development efforts depends upon making women full partners . . . To be certain, education, by itself, is not a panacea, but it is a necessary, if often insufficient, condition for the advancement of women and girls. It is in schools and adult education programmes that the journey out of poverty and towards employment and decision-making power begins.*

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Violence against Women

... He strangles me and takes me into the garage and tells me, "Now you're going to die." He has one hand on my throat and pulls back the other one to slap me in the face; with his fist in the air, he looks me straight in the eye and says, "You want to die?...

This is just one of the many testimonies presented to the Canadian Panel on Violence against Women, whose report on the subject appeared in 1993. It could be the voice of a woman anywhere in the world.

Violence against women is a global problem that occurs in both public and private domains, instilling fear and insecurity in many women's lives. It is pervasive, and yet it is often invisible. Though some types of violence against women, such as rape, have long been considered criminal acts, it is only recently that violence against women has been recognized as a violation of basic human rights.

EVOLUTION OF THE ISSUE

Violence against women is as old as human civilization. However, it became a matter of international concern in 1975 when the UN held the first world conference on women in Mexico City. Gender-based violence was given prominence during the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) and became a matter of priority in the second half of the 1980s. The increasing concern over the victims of violence and the need for change were voiced both by bodies within the UN and by NGOs.

At the second and third UN conferences on women, the issue gained further momentum with calls for national and international measures to curb the incidence of such violence.

In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the historic **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**. More than 130 Member States have to date agreed to abide by most of the Convention's provisions. They have committed themselves to modifying their laws, customs and practices to promote women's equality and rights. Although the Convention's focus is comprehensive, it never specifically singles out violence against women, although Article Six condemns "all forms of traffic in women and the exploitation of prostitution of women".

The **Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies**, adopted in 1985, recognized gender-specific violence as a serious form of abuse. The Strategies provided a framework for action at the national, regional and international levels. Legal measures to prevent violence were outlined, as well as the requirements for setting up national mechanisms to deal with the problem.

A later review of progress in the implementation of these Strategies found that violence is often linked to and reinforces the social, economic and political inequality that women experience as part of their daily lives.

In 1992, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women formulated General Recommendation 19, which specifically categorized gender-based violence as violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately and is discriminatory.

The **Vienna Declaration on Human Rights** in 1993 (paras. 18 and 38) deemed violence against women as a violation of human rights. It recognized the egregious nature of violence against women and its human rights dimensions, paving the way for international recognition of the issue.

The **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women** was adopted by the UN General Assembly in late 1993, on the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women. It emphasizes violence against women as a violation of human rights and recommends strategies to be employed by Member States and the specialized agencies of the UN to eliminate it.

- **Article One** of the Declaration defines for the first time what constitutes an act of violence against women. The term "violence against women" implies any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

- **Article Two** of the Declaration specifies the types of violence to which women are subjected both within and outside the family as well as violence perpetrated or condoned by States.

Focus on the issue further intensified in March 1994 when the UN Commission on Human Rights condemned all acts of gender-based violence and appointed a **Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women**.

The Special Rapporteur will seek and receive information on such violence, its causes and consequences; recommend measures at the national, regional and international levels for its elimination; and work closely with the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women.

Though much action has taken place on the issue, the draft Platform for Action of the **Fourth World Conference on Women** goes further by observing that violence against women derives essentially from the lower status accorded to women in the family and in society. Physical, psychological or sexual violence, whether occurring in the home or in society, is linked to male power, privilege and control.

Violence against women is seen to be abetted by ignorance, lack of laws to prohibit violence, inadequate efforts by public authorities to enforce existing laws, and absence of educational and other means to address its causes. The lack of adequate statistics about violence thwarts efforts to elaborate programmes and monitor its prevalence.

Responsibility of the State

In the past decade, efforts at the international level have forced national policy makers to address the issue of violence against women. The signing of international declarations and charters is just one step in a long-term effort. Unless individual Member States of the United Nations take action in their respective countries and accord violence against women the serious attention it deserves, progress will remain slow.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women identifies the kinds of violence perpetrated or condoned by the State.

Article Four spells out in detail the role and responsibility of the State in condemning violence against women and in taking action to abolish it. **States "should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination".**

Several Governments have responded and taken action to enact and strengthen legislation and establish support systems for women who are victims of such violence.

States also have the responsibility to ensure that women feel protected sufficiently to report complaints of violence. Some positive steps have taken place in this regard:

- In Pakistan, for example, the Government is currently establishing women-only police stations, an experiment which has already met with success in Brazil, Colombia (where by end of 1992, 60 special stations had been set up), Uruguay and Peru. The reporting of crimes against women has substantially increased in these countries;
- In the Philippines, since 1993, all police stations have been obliged to establish women's desks staffed by specially trained female officers who investigate crimes of violence against women.

Before these desks existed, few statistics were available to assess the dimensions of the problem. A 1993 police study in the Philippines found that 80 per cent of rape reports and data on other forms of violence against women, such as battering, harassment or verbal abuse, were omitted from police records and crime-index tables. To date, more than 160 women's desks have been established in police stations in the Philippines, staffed by over 275 policewomen. As a result, the police now take the issue of violence against women more seriously.

The draft Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women expects Governments to take several measures to eliminate or at least limit violence against women. These include:

- Reviewing existing legislation on violence;
- Providing training and orientation to police and judicial personnel, doctors, nurses and social workers to recognize abuses perpetrated against women;
- Supporting shelters that offer protection to women from abuse.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence against women cuts across all racial, social, cultural, economic, political and religious spectrums. Often it is perpetrated by those whom they have been encouraged to trust and respect, and those whom they love. [1]

The most endemic form of violence against women is spousal abuse, or, more accurately, abuse of women by intimate male partners. While forms of abuse range from humiliation and economic coercion to physical brutality, the abuse itself is universal, occurring in developed, industrialized countries with the same frequency as in the developing world.

Studies have shown that in many countries, one quarter to more than half of women report having been physically abused by a current or former partner. An even larger percentage have been subjected to continuous emotional and psychological abuse. [2]

Given the low status of women in many societies, the following statistics should come as no shock:

- Reports from France indicate that 95 per cent of its victims of violence are women, 51 per cent of these at the hands of their husbands. In Denmark, 25 per cent of women cite violence as the reason for divorce. [3]
- A historical analysis of murders at the end of the nineteenth century in England and Wales showed that about 50 per cent of the victims were murdered by their husbands, lovers or boyfriends. The comparison with official figures in the United Kingdom today shows that this pattern has not changed. [4]
- In the US, more women are injured in domestic violence incidents than in car accidents, rapes and muggings put together. Thus, for the past four years, US Surgeons General have warned that domestic violence — not heart attacks or cancer or strokes — poses the single largest threat of injury to adult women in the US. [5]
- In a study of 80 battered women in San José, Costa Rica, 49 per cent reported being beaten during pregnancy. [6]
- In Canada, 62 per cent of women murdered in 1987 died at the hands of their spouses.
- In Papua New Guinea, 67 per cent of rural women and 56 per cent of urban women have been victims of spousal abuse, according to a national survey conducted by the Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission.
- In Bangladesh, the killing of women by their husbands accounts for 50 per cent of all murders.

Social inequality between the sexes is one contributing factor to women's subordinate position within the family. As a result, many societies condone the "disciplining" of wives, and tend to ignore or trivialize even severe incidents of domestic violence.

In recent years, however, largely due to the efforts of NGOs, wife battering has become an issue of importance. Women's NGOs, in particular, are making progress on the issue by providing shelters, legal aid and financial support to victims of domestic violence.

- The **Women's Federation in Beijing**, for example, became concerned about the frequency of domestic violence in the three-generation families that make up two thirds of Chinese households. The Federation organized over 600 legal-knowledge training classes, reaching 90,000 women. [7]

RAPE

- In South Africa, a woman is raped every 90 seconds, totalling approximately 320,000 women raped each year. [8]
- In the US, 16 women every hour are confronted by rapists; a woman is raped every six minutes. In 1991, the Federal Bureau of Investigation recorded 106,593 rapes in the United States. [9]

- In July 1991, a group of teenage boys attacked and raped 71 schoolgirls at a boarding-school in one East African country for refusing to participate in a protest strike against the local school administrators. Nineteen girls lost their lives in the attack. [10]

Statistics like this, from all around the world, demonstrate that sexual coercion is common in the lives of women and girls. Six well-designed studies from the US, for example, indicate that between one-in-five and one-in-seven of US women will be the victim of a rape in their lifetime. [11] Such US data are consistent with studies of rape in other parts of the world.

Rape or sexual assault can be most damaging psychologically to a woman, leaving emotional scars that time and counselling often cannot erase. In addition to the rape of adult women, there have been increasing reports of incidents of incest and rape of young girls.

Instead of sympathy and support, male-dominated societies — especially those that emphasize virginity for unmarried women and sexual fidelity for wives — often blame the raped woman for the violence used against her. Far from being the victim in incidents of rape, she is treated as the accused.

Most countries have strong laws against rape and offer varying degrees of punishment to offenders. Several are now trying to set up systems that offer help and rehabilitation to the victims. However, some Governments still have repressive laws that make it possible for the victims of rape to be charged with criminal offences. Ordinances in at least one South Asian country equate rape with adultery. Thus rape is treated as a sexual lapse (on the part of the victim) and not as a crime. Rape victims charged with adultery can be sentenced to be publicly whipped, imprisoned or stoned to death. [12] Thousands of women languish in jails under the law. [13]

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

While rape is the most obvious form of sexual violence against women, sexual harassment is part of the daily indignities that women have to suffer on the streets and in the workplace: teasing, jeering, and unwanted touching and pinching of their bodies are common examples.

In some cultures, it is given delicate labels or euphemisms, or viewed with good humour, and the psychological and emotional stress it causes its victims is ignored.

In recent times, increased attention to sexual harassment at the workplace, which includes sexual favours demanded of female employees in return for career advancement or job security, has led to changes and additions in the law.

- In the US, for example, amendments were made in 1991 to the existing Civil Rights Act that categorize sexual harassment as being discriminatory and allow targets of such harassment to recover compensatory and punitive damages.

As a result, women who have faced sexual harassment in the workplace now have recourse to the courts. In reaction, several US companies are taking active steps to establish a corporate sexual harassment policy to deter abusers and protect the victims of such harassment.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which affects millions of women, primarily in parts of Africa, is recognized as a human rights issue and an act of violence against women, as well as a health concern.

Female genital mutilation is the collective name given to different traditional practices that involve the cutting of female genitals. Here, FGM is reserved to describe ritualistic practices where actual cutting and removal of sexual organs takes place.

FGM, also known as female circumcision, can be divided into two broad categories:

- Clitoridectomy — which involves partial or total removal of the clitoris or removal of both the clitoris and the labia minora. About 85 per cent of all women who undergo FGM have clitoridectomies.
- Infibulation — which involves the removal of the clitoris, the cutting off of some or all of the labia minora and incisions made in the labia majora to create raw surfaces. About 15 per cent of women who undergo FGM have infibulations. [14]

Most commonly, girls experience FGM at an age well before puberty, usually when they are between four and eight years old.

Women and girls experience pain, trauma and frequently severe complications, such as bleeding, infection, or urine retention, sometimes leading to death. The long-term physical and medical complications are numerous — in the case of infibulation, frequent recutting and stitching are often required — and there are substantial psychological effects on women's self-image and sexual lives.

- Globally, at least two million girls a year are at risk of genital mutilation — approximately 6,000 per day. An estimated 85 million to 114 million girls and women in the world are genitally mutilated.

Most live in Africa, a few in Asia and, in recent years, cases have been reported in Europe, Canada and the US, where several immigrant African populations have settled.

It is important to note that FGM was also used by modern physicians in England and the US, as recently as the 1940s and 1950s, to "treat" hysteria, lesbianism, masturbation, and other so-called female deviances. [15]

According to Nahid Toubia, a Sudanese doctor who actively campaigns against FGM, it is a cultural practice, with no religious sanction attached to it. There is a wide misconception that it is an Islamic custom.

Recent efforts at the international level, particularly by UN agencies, have successfully placed FGM on women's health and human rights agendas. At the national level, several Governments and national leaders have condemned FGM, but few have translated their concern into laws prohibiting FGM.

- Egypt has had a Ministry of Health decree since 1959 that limits the types of FGM allowed and attempts to have them performed under medical supervision only.
- Kenya banned FGM in 1990.
- Burkina Faso has incorporated into its draft constitution a prohibition on female circumcision.

In 1984, the Inter-African Committee against Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children was created by African women to combat FGM. It is now an international NGO, based in Geneva, with members in most countries where FGM occurs.

Aside from changes in laws, education on FGM is needed in the communities where it is

practised. According to Nahid Toubia, there is a pressing need for action on FGM, especially by using the mass media and popular culture to disseminate information, generate internal discussion and debate and present the basic health facts in an accessible manner among affected populations.

MISSING WOMEN

While abuse is a daily factor of many women's lives, there are others for whom it is fatal. Harvard University economist Amartya Sen shocked the world when he announced in 1990 that 100 million women were missing from global population figures, almost entirely from South and East Asia. [16] Sen's figure was later reduced to 60 million women by Princeton demographer Ansley Coale.

The "missing women" are the victims of foeticide, infanticide, selective malnourishment, denial of health care and various forms of gender violence. [17]

In countries where most people have adequate health care and food, there are an average of 105 females to each 100 males. But in some of the world's poorer nations, the sex ratio is dramatically lower: 95 females to each 100 males. [18]

In several parts of the world, a mix of economic pressures and traditional beliefs gives preference to male children.

Boys' labour is needed in the fields in agrarian societies and, unlike girls, they bring in dowry to the household. Girls require the payment of dowry and parents fear the financial burden of their upbringing and marriage. As a Telugu proverb in India says, "Bringing up a girl is like watering a plant in someone else's courtyard." [19] From the moment they are born, girls are considered the property of their prospective husbands' household.

- In one survey in Bangladesh, 96 per cent of women said they wanted their next child to be a boy. Only three per cent wanted a girl. [20]

In communities where boys are preferred, women are blamed and made to feel guilty and ashamed for giving birth to daughters. As a result, the pressure to get rid of the female child can be intolerable.

> *Through a haze of heat and pain, the new mother hears the midwife mutter: "another daughter", and she bursts into loud sobs. Burdened with guilt for having two girls already, during this pregnancy she had prayed desperately for a son ...*
>
> — *Education of the Girl Child: Her Right, Society's Gain*, UNICEF, 1992

Gender-selective Abortion and Infanticide

Some girls are rejected even before birth. Several studies confirm that access to prenatal tests such as amniocentesis and ultrasound scanning, which detect the sex of the unborn child, is sufficiently widespread in many countries so that foeticide could, in fact, be responsible for skewing male-female ratios. [21]

Since the late 1970s, when this technology became widely available, thousands of female foetuses which were identified have been aborted.

Although genetic testing for sex selection has been banned in India under recent legislation [22] and in China since January 1995, it is still a lucrative underground business in these countries.

In spite of the relatively high cost of the procedure, most of the clients are women or couples

from the middle and lower classes who would rather pay for the test and abortion than have to find the money for a dowry years later.

- In a chain of clinics offering sex preselection services in 46 countries in Europe, the US, Asia and Latin America, 248 out of 263 couples selected boys and 15 selected girls. [23]

Even when female babies survive the womb, they may not survive infancy.

- A World Bank report in 1990 said: "The deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by almost one third of a million every year. Every sixth infant death is specifically due to gender discrimination." [24]

Dowry Deaths

The dowry was originally a wedding gift to a daughter from her family — of money, jewellery, clothing or household items. It was also a kind of insurance, some personal wealth in case of mistreatment by her new family or a failed marriage.

Now, it has become common for the groom and his family to demand a dowry of a large amount of money or goods at the time of marriage. In fact, the prevalence of this custom is why many, especially poor, South Asian parents don't want to have a daughter.

Dowry-related abuse is common in many countries. The most extreme form is "bride burning", wherein women are burnt to death (usually in the kitchen, in order to make it seem like an accident with the stove) by their husbands or in-laws.

WOMEN IN AREAS OF CONFLICT

While all civilians suffer when war breaks out, it is women and girls who face the most risk and danger — not just the risk of being killed or injured, but also of being raped, sexually assaulted or abused.

Women have been subjected, throughout history, to especially brutal forms of rape as part of war. Rape is used as a symbolic weapon of war by combatants to humiliate their enemies and force submission.

In recent years, mass rape — as a systematic weapon of war — has been documented in the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda. [25]

- A European Union fact-finding team estimates that more than 20,000 Muslim women were raped in Bosnia since fighting began in April 1992. Many were held at "rape camps" where they were raped repeatedly and forced to bear Serbian children against their will. [26]

A UNESCO report (CEDAW/C/1995/3/Add.3) on **"The Use of Rape as a Tool of War"**, which examined the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, observed that in the Serb attacks on Bosnian Muslim villages, rape had been systematic, committed on the order of higher authorities and under their supervision, and thus had been used as a "tool of war" as part of a wider expansionist strategy.

The **International Tribunal of War Crimes**, set up by the UN Security Council in 1993 to consider the situation in the former Yugoslavia, considers mass rape as a "crime against humanity." [27]

The draft Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women takes a strong stand against the abuse of women during war and conflict. It asks Governments to condemn the use of war-related violence against women, such as mass rapes, forced pregnancies and other gender-specific abuses, and to consider them war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Refugees

> *Lien is 22 and from South-East Asia. Over two years ago, she boarded a flimsy fishing boat with 79 other people and set sail for a nearby country. The reserves of food and water were soon exhausted ... twice they were attacked by pirates ... Lien was one of the several young women taken aboard the pirates' boat and repeatedly raped ... later she was rescued, and today is in a transit camp awaiting acceptance by a Western country.*
>
> — *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Refugee Women*, 1985

It is estimated that 80 per cent of the world's 23 million refugees are women and children — most exposed to poor nutrition or illness and many of the women and girls to violence, including rape.

- As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported: "Rape, abduction, sexual harassment, physical violence and the not infrequent obligation to provide "sexual favours" in return for documentation and/or relief goods remain a distressing reality for many women refugees." [28]

There are few available data to quantify the plight of women refugees, though the horror stories of attacks by soldiers, rebels, border guards and others with whom they come into contact have grown.

Studies have also noted a rise in domestic violence in the aftermath of a war; male refugees, having lost control over their own lives, are often known to beat up women in their families in an attempt to exercise control over them. In their host countries, refugee women often don't know the language or the laws and opt to suffer in silence.

UNHCR, UNIFEM, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the UN Border Relief Operation in Cambodia have developed strategies to assist refugee women.

UNHCR has developed formal guidelines on preventing and responding to sexual violence, based on detailed recommendations by fieldworkers experienced with the rape and piracy attacks on refugees in all parts of the world.

The guidelines provide fieldworkers with practical advice on medical, psychological and legal ramifications of sexual violence. They are also intended to dispel the discomfort of many refugee workers with such crimes and counter any tendency to dismiss them as the inevitable by-product of social breakdown.

Ann Howarth-Wiles, UNHCR's Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, calls the guidelines "a fundamental primer" that should "immeasurably improve the sensitivity and skills of people who work with refugees". [29]

UNHCR has issued policy statements encouraging countries to consider that when rape or other forms of sexual violence are committed for reasons of race or political opinion, for example — and particularly when this is condoned by the authorities concerned — then the victims should be eligible for refugee status. [30]

Income-earning schemes can enhance the self-sufficiency of refugee women and leave them less vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

- More than 30,000 Afghan refugee women in Pakistan are producing bags, quilts, school uniforms and carpets as part of a UNHCR income-generating programme.

- Refugee women are also involved in many other refugee camp programmes. In a refugee settlement in Zaire, the camp population has elected female coordinators.

The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) launched a programme called **African Women in Crisis** (AFWIC) in 1993 to promote the economic independence of refugee and internally displaced women in Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, for example, Liberian women refugees have learned skills, including surveying and construction, that are immediately useful and will also be vital for rebuilding Liberia.

SLAVERY AND TRAFFICKING

Trafficking in women is a global "industry" that transcends borders and cultures and is based on the sexual exploitation of women.

Women have been traditionally trafficked across borders for prostitution. In recent times, the traffic has often been disguised as mail-order brides and/or domestic labour schemes.

While it is difficult to estimate the number of women trafficked worldwide every year, there seem to be some clear patterns of movement — usually it is women from South-East Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe who are trafficked domestically and transnationally.

Often, they are brought from poorer countries to the economically more advanced ones, sometimes abducted from their rural villages and sold in big cities, both within their country and abroad.

Trafficking and prostitution both flourish because of the increasing number of women and families living in absolute poverty and the lack of real options for economic well-being and advancement. But trafficking is also flourishing because of the affluence of some countries and regions that allows men to buy sex and have access to a greater variety of sexual options.

Prostitution

A few girls may choose to work in the sex industry because it often pays better than other jobs available to poor women. But for many, the decision is beyond their control. Tens of thousands of young girls and women worldwide are forced into prostitution in order to save themselves and their children from starvation.

In poor areas where there are few job opportunities, some families pay "job agencies" to take their daughters and find work for them — only to find out much later that the agents are linked with the sex industry and that the work they found for the girls was as prostitutes. Many of these girls work in dismal conditions, working 10 to 12 hours a day. Often their employers or agents batter them and control their earnings. AIDS is now the new threat in their lives.

However, several NGOs are attempting to improve the lives of these girls. The *Thai Women of Tomorrow* programme run at the Chiang Mai University in Thailand is providing educational and career alternatives to young women in order to protect them from being forced to enter prostitution and the sex industry. It has granted 1,000 scholarships worth US$120 each to sixth-grade girls in Pha Yao and Chiang Rai provinces. Another 500 young girls are being trained as dressmakers, health-care assistants, jewellery makers and secretaries in the programme.

Mail-order Brides

Mail-order brides is a flourishing trade in which there are increasing numbers of brokering agencies that arrange "marriages", primarily between women from the developing world and men from industrialized countries.

Although these women may voluntarily apply as mail-order brides with marriage agencies, they often believe they will be able to choose their marriage partners. When they arrive in the country of their husbands-to-be, they often find limited choice and abuse.

Lost in their new country — with limited language skills, no knowledge of the local laws and culture, and most often without their passports, which are usually taken away by their new husbands — these brides find it difficult to get away.

Domestic Maids

Women who are recruited as domestic servants overseas can often face a fate similar to that of mail-order brides. Several work in Western Europe and the Middle East, working long hours with no breaks, often facing physical, sexual and mental abuse at the hands of their employers.

They live in slave-like conditions in countries where they do not speak the language and their employer has control of their travel papers.

- According to the *Human Rights Watch* 1993 report: 1,400 Filipino maids in one Middle Eastern country fled to their embassy, seeking protection from their employers, between April 1991 and April 1992.
- In 60 cases of abuse of Asian maids investigated by *Human Rights Watch* in that country, one third involved rape or sexual assault.

Child Prostitution

> *There is systemic and individual criminality, coupled with corruption, which profiteers from prostitutes in general and child prostitutes in particular ... At the very worst, children are abducted, drugged and coerced by gangs and syndicates into prostitution both locally and across frontiers. They may also be killed or maimed in the process.*
>
> — *Rights of the Child. Sale of Children*, Special Rapporteur, UN Commission on Human Rights, January 1993

More than one million children are forced into prostitution every year; most are in Asia. While few country-based statistics are available, it seems clear that many of the women trafficked are actually mere girls aged eight to 16. [31]

- In Latin America, child prostitution — linked to poverty, the plight of street children, drug abuse and sex tourism — has been reported in virtually every country.
- In Brazil, there are reports of thousands of girls forced into prostitution in mining camps in the Amazon region.

Protection is guaranteed to children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, until Member States enact adequate laws and take initiatives to protect children from brutality, little progress is possible.

Pressure from NGOs and the media has spurred responses from some Governments.

- Thailand has passed legislation to stiffen penalities against perpetrators, and its Prime Minister has announced a campaign to end child prostitution.

- The Philippines adopted a Child Protection Code in 1992 against child abuse.
- France and the Scandinavian countries have laws making sexual exploitation of children by their nationals in foreign countries illegal, and Germany is enacting a similar measure.

Sex Tourism

The sex tourism industry is the reverse of trafficking. In this case, clients travel abroad, particularly to South-East Asia, to meet prostitutes. Several small travel agencies in the West now operate "sex tours" — transporting men to the East on "erotic pleasure trips".

Sex tourism in fact is a significant foreign-exchange earner for countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and several others in the developing world.

OBSTACLES, TRENDS AND GOALS

Violence against women is now recognized as a major issue of concern. However, much remains to be done to deal effectively with it. There is great need for educational programmes and legislation to be formulated so that societies can change the way women are perceived.

The challenge is considerable. There exist many more types of practices that need to be eradicated.

- Early marriage, for example, thrusts a girl into the role of a wife and mother when she is still a child herself.
- The mistreatment of widows and elderly women is common in numerous parts of the world. In some cultures in South Asia, a widow is blamed for the death of her spouse and abused by her in-laws and the local community: her head is shaved, and she has limited access to food and resources.
- In parts of northern India, the practice of "sati" — where the widow would commit suicide on the funeral pyre of her husband — is now increasingly rare.

The challenge ahead is not just in identifying violence against women in its many forms and taking action to prevent it, but also in educating the next generation to prevent its occurrence in the future. Children are often the first witnesses to incidents of domestic violence and many remain psychologically scarred for life as a result. Others suffer a worse fate.

- In the US, for example, more babies are now born with birth defects as a result of mothers being battered during pregnancy than from a combination of all diseases and illnesses for which pregnant women are now immunized. [32]

Each different form of violence must be seen in its larger social context. Gender-based violence is the consequence of consistent social, economic and political inequality of women in society.

Cultural attitudes in all parts of the world need to change, as well as the power relationships between men and women. Unless the unequal relationship between men and women is recognized, as well as men's power and control over women and their treatment of women as property in many societies, no amount of legal reform can reverse the phenomenon.

Other aspects, such as women's education, the building of self-esteem and economic empowerment, are equally critical issues. Some urgent measures include:

- More shelters and safe havens for battered women;

- Strengthened legislation;
- Reforming and sensitizing the criminal justice system to women's abuse, including the law, police, the courts and correctional services that can help safeguard women's rights and dignity;
- The discrediting of myths and misinformation, such as blaming the victim for "provoking" violence.

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Women and Power: Where Women Stand Today

What we need are not just a few women who make history, but many women who make policy.

— Geraldine Ferraro, 1984 Vice-Presidential candidate in the United States, at the 1991 International Women's Day event at the UN

Women around the world share a common condition: they are not full and equal participants in public policy choices that affect their lives. The top decision-making positions remain largely male-dominated spheres where women have little influence.

Women's exclusion from power in the public arena is in sharp contrast to their ability to make crucial decisions relating to the survival of their families. Not only do millions of women manage scarce resources related to household consumption and health matters, but they organize, supervise, teach, heal, solve problems and make peace, providing our societies with the cohesion required for development.

Since the first world conference on women in Mexico City two decades ago, many women have entered the public arena, where they have become decision makers at all levels: in politics, business, industry, the civil service and the media. Many more have reached leadership positions in non-governmental organizations and community groups, effectively exercising or influencing power.

The names Aquino, Bhutto, Chamorro, Gandhi and Perón are associated with female leaders as much as men. However, while more women serve as heads of State or Government, ministers, members of parliament, mayors and members of local councils than ever before, their numbers are usually too small to affect significantly the power structures that shape society. It is notable that many developing countries have made more progress in high-level political representation of women than some industrialized countries.

Nowhere is the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality among men and women greater than in the area of decision-making.

> *We see this in legislative chambers, in Governments, and in public service — equality for women in law is not mirrored by parity in representation.*
>
> — Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali at a gathering to mark International Women's Day in March 1994

In a period of increasing democratization on a global scale, women comprise more than half of the voters in almost all countries. They have had the right to vote and hold office in most countries for more than a generation. However, this has not translated into equal representation.

In only a few countries — mainly those in Scandinavia — are the proportions of men and women in decision-making and public policy-making more or less equal. On the whole, most countries are far from achieving the target of 30 per cent women in decision-making levels by 1995 set by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The UN has set similar goals for its professional staff and has stepped up efforts to recruit and advance women within the Organization.

Still, women are largely absent from the leadership of international organizations, the top level of the diplomatic corps, the boards of transnational corporations and banks, and the higher ranks of the military and the police.

The lack of women's participation in political decision-making has important consequences. It deprives women of important rights and responsibilities as citizens, and excludes their perspectives and interests from policy-making and decision-making. Their voices are missing from key decisions on national budgets and setting of government priorities. Their skills and viewpoints often remain unheard, underrepresented or ignored.

POLITICS: NATIONAL TO INTERNATIONAL

> *In a male-led world reeling from one disaster to another, women in rich and poor countries alike are organizing to transform "old-boy" politics and win an equal role in fate-of-the-Earth decisions ...*
>
> — Gloria Steinem, 1994 [1]

In the Western world, only after countless demonstrations, hunger strikes and active lobbying did women obtain the right to vote, first in New Zealand in 1893. Two historical factors were decisive in women's securing the right to vote: their increasing participation in "male" jobs during the industrial revolution; and their substantial contributions in the world wars.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, women in several countries led prolonged struggles to obtain the right to vote. In Europe and North America in particular, opposition to women's suffrage was based mainly on the assumption that women and politics did not belong together, that politics was a "non-feminine" activity. [2]

In other parts of the world, women earned their access to the modern political process through their active participation in the struggles against colonialism, for national liberation and in the formation of new States. In India, for example, women received the vote following independence as a natural extension of their active participation in the freedom struggle. [3] Wars, revolutions and independence movements brought waves of women into the voting booth.

By 1987, women had the right to vote in at least 115 countries, according to the **Inter-Parliamentary Union**, an NGO of national parliaments. [4]

In most countries, women won the right to vote and the right to stand for election at the same time. Although women have voted in increasing numbers in countries with democratic elections, the numbers of women in elective or appointive offices remain unacceptably low.

Few women, for example, reach the top levels of participation in national legislatures; even fewer reach major decision-making positions in government.

- On average, worldwide only 10.5 per cent of legislators and only 6.1 per cent of ministerial-level decision makers in 1994 were women. [5]
- In Norway, which has a female Prime Minister, 37 per cent of the cabinet and 39 per cent of Parliament consist of women.
- In the US, women in the current Congress comprise slightly over 11 per cent in the House and 7 per cent in the Senate.
- In other developed regions, participation rose from about 7 per cent in 1975 to about 17 per cent in 1994, with a high of 34 per cent in the Nordic countries. [6]
- In **Eastern Europe**, women's participation in parliament dropped sharply — from 22 per cent in 1987 to 6.5 per cent in 1993 — largely as a result of the collapse of communism and the elimination of quotas for women in parliament. However, a recent Inter-Parliamentary Union report (June 1994) shows an improvement in women's representation in 1994. In the Polish Senate, women's representation increased from 8 per cent in 1991 to 13 per cent in 1994; in Hungary, from 7.3 per cent in 1990 to almost 11 per cent in 1994.

In most countries of the world, women have not been — and still are not — candidates for leadership positions. Often they have limited access to the channels for achieving power at the top, especially in the executive bodies of political parties and trade unions.

In many countries undergoing dramatic political changes, women's active role in the process of democratization has induced significant political and legal changes. But the advent of democracy has not necessarily provided equal participation in politics and decision-making.

Prejudice, tradition and undemocratic regimes also hamper women in their quest for political power.

When women do achieve ministerial positions in government, they are usually put in charge of such ministries as education, health, culture, social welfare, youth and women's affairs, and sometimes justice and legal affairs. Very few serve in such key sectors as finance, defence and internal and foreign affairs.

A DIFFERENT STYLE?

If women share political power equally with men, will it change the way we live? While some argue that power defines the person regardless of gender, others believe women can wield power differently.

> *As women lead, they are changing leadership; as they organize, they are changing organization ... When women lead and articulate their purposes, it seems to me that they work together not only as individuals but with a sense of community and networking in a healthy way ... Women have fresh and imaginative skills of dialogue and are setting a more open, flexible and compassionate style of leadership.*
>
> — President Mary Robinson of Ireland in a speech at the Global Forum of Women, 1992

Very often, women bring a new agenda and more creative methods, and manage to make a difference in government policies.

- The strong presence of women in Norway's Government has made it a leading champion of human rights as well as women's rights, peace, environmental protection and development assistance.

- In Sweden, women working both within and outside Government prevented their country from entering the nuclear arms race and blocked efforts to continue use of nuclear power. [7]

Strategies to Address Inequities

Strategies for propelling women into leadership roles include:

- Increasing women's participation in voting activity through education and information campaigns; and training in political and leadership skills, funding and campaign assistance for potential women candidates for political office.

Affirmative action (the steps to eliminate existing, remedy past and prevent future discrimination) can also encourage opportunities for women.

The purpose of affirmative action is to ensure that both women and men have an equal opportunity to compete for any decision-making or power-wielding position.

Quotas, or the reservation of a certain percentage of jobs for women in decision-making positions, are considered one such means of affirmative action.

Edith Cresson, the former French Prime Minister, said in 1991 that the only way to achieve a "massive increase in the number of women in all walks of political life" is through electoral systems which "make it possible to allocate to women a significant and compulsory percentage of political posts ... Women are denied positions of responsibility not by the people but by the senior party politicians and political commentators who are all men in the traditional mould." [8]

There is much debate today about the effectiveness of quota systems. In the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, where quotas existed for women, it is argued that women had no more impact than in countries without quota systems. Women's representation in State legislatures was often mere "tokenism". This is widely thought to have resulted in unqualified and passive women filling the quotas which were allocated only to the official women's and other mass organizations, trade unions and ruling Communist parties. [9]

At an Inter-Parliamentary Union Symposium in 1989, however, participants focused on how quotas and other mechanisms to increase women's participation could provide more than token representation in multiparty systems as well as be a way to give women some leverage in authoritarian societies.

Participants agreed that at least 30 per cent female representation would provide the "critical mass" of gender balance needed to influence decision-making bodies by integrating the views, needs and concerns of women.

Quotas have been used as token percentages that segregate women into marginal positions, but also as larger percentages that genuinely expand women's access to political power.

What has, however, proved more effective in increasing women's representation in state legislatures is an electoral system with proportional gender representation. As part of it, political parties are encouraged to have a certain percentage of female representatives in their executive bodies as well as in their list of party candidates. Sweden was the first to try out quotas within its political parties, in 1972, with the result that female representation in the executive body of the Liberal Party reached 40 per cent. Political parties in Denmark, France and Norway have also introduced similar quotas. [10] Proportional representation is also a feature in Brazil, Greece and Hungary.

Another way of ensuring affirmative action is for Governments to define specific goals, timetables, targets and numbers that would help accelerate the pace of gender equality. The UN set a goal for itself to place women in 35 per cent of its Professional staff positions overall and 25 per cent in higher-level posts by 1995. At the end of 1994, the proportion of women in all Professional posts stood at 33 per cent, and in higher-level posts, at 16 per cent. [11]

Affirmative Actions at the National Level

- The Sudan has established a 10 per cent minimum quota level for women's representation in all positions of local, municipal and state government.
- In 1992, the United Republic of Tanzania passed a law requiring that at least 15 per cent of all members of parliament be female.
- Antigua and Barbuda has set itself a goal of electing a minimum of seven women in Parliament by 1999.
- In March 1993, Argentina implemented a law establishing quotas in the lists of political parties to guarantee a minimum of 30 per cent participation by women.
- Bangladesh attributes the increase of women in the civil services to the success of introducing quotas. Women's participation rose from 17 per cent of officers in the Secretariat in 1987 to 26 per cent in 1991 and from seven per cent of officers in the Directorates in 1987 to 20 per cent in 1991.

NEW ROLE AS CIVIL AUTHORITIES

The number of women entering positions of civil authority and administrative and policy-making jobs has increased considerably in the past few years.

Police Women

In many countries, according to data submitted to the United Nations Secretariat in national reports on the status and advancement of women as of December 1994, participation of women in police forces in terms of both numbers and level increased, especially over the last five years. In one country in 1992, female cadets and trainees reached 33 per cent of the total. In another country, 13 per cent of the police chiefs were women. [12]

Most police women are specifically assigned to handle cases of violence against women, including rape, or to supervise female prisons and prisoners. Although women's contribution in these areas has been considerable, the possibilities for promotion and career development are limited. Policewomen also face certain cultural difficulties with their male colleagues and with offenders who often do not recognize their authority.

Civil Service

Occupational segregation is a feature of most public administrations. While women on the government payroll are usually teachers, nurses or clerical employees or employed in departments like social welfare, men are employed in more critical departments such as defence or finance.

As a result, top positions in the civil service are still largely denied to women. One study identified impediments to women interested in a civil service career, including: [13]

- Socialization that instils and reinforces attitudes that stifle their aspirations;

- Gender stereotyping in jobs and in society as a whole;
- Lack of access to education and specialized training;
- Entry-level barriers and discriminatory promotion practices;
- Double burden of family and career responsibilities.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The growing presence of women in the global workforce and in almost every field of business and enterprise is one of the great demographic trends of the century. However, as in political life, positions in top management and decision-making in business elude women.

In the 1970s and 1980s, companies began to recruit women for management positions often because women could help them serve new markets and customers and become more profitable. Now women confront a new challenge: breaking through the "glass ceiling" that keeps many of them from being promoted to senior-management positions.

Regardless of whether organizations are public or private, large or small, national or international, women are entering the lower ranks of management, but rarely advancing to the top.

WOMEN AS LEADERS

Only a handful of women have reached the level of presidents or prime ministers:

Presidents

In the past:

Corazon Aquino in the Philippines;

Ertha Pascal-Trouillot in Haiti;

Isabel Perón in Argentina;

Lidia Geiler in Bolivia.

As of December 1994:

Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua;

Vigdis Finnbogadottir in Iceland;

Mary Robinson in Ireland;

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka.

Prime Ministers

In the past:

Golda Meir in Israel;

Indira Gandhi in India;

Hanna Suchocka in Poland;

Edith Cresson in France;

Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom;

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo in Portugal;

Agathe Uwilingiyimana in Rwanda;

Kazimiera Danute-Prunskiene in Lithuania;

Milka Planinc in Yugoslavia;

Kim Campbell in Canada.

As of December 1994:

Gro Harlem Brundtland in Norway;

Eugenia Charles in Dominica;

Tansu Ciller in Turkey;

Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan;

Khaleda Ziaur Rahman in Bangladesh;

Siramavo Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka.

They represent an estimated 40 per cent of the workforce, but less than 20 per cent of management, and less than 6 per cent of senior management.

Women fail to make their mark in top positions in industry because they usually begin their careers in support positions as secretarial staff, or in human resources, accounting and public relations. They rarely gain experience in core areas such as manufacturing, marketing and sales, and, therefore, are later denied top positions in management. [14]

When women do rise to top positions, their potential is often underutilized. Stereotypes and misconceptions prevent organizations from appreciating the distinctive approaches that women bring to management and decision-making. Some research suggests that women managers may be better able to reconcile concerns for bottom-line results with a concern for people and to focus on both ends and means, and may be better planners and communicators. [15]

Female managers find it tough to break into the "old-boys network" of senior managers. But as their numbers grow, they are building networks of their own and adopting the mentoring system — by which successful female leaders guide the careers of junior women professionals.

MEDIA

Increasingly, the mass media are influencing the social and political agendas of the day. In addition to pursuing careers of their choice, women who establish careers in the media are in a better position to voice their concerns and opinions.

Ever since the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), increasing numbers of women have entered the mainstream media as reporters and editors, producers and directors, as well as established a growing women's alternative media.

> *Almost everywhere an increase in the number of women working in mainstream media has been recorded. But the power to develop media policy, and to determine the nature and shape of media content, continues to elude women.*
>
> — Margaret Gallagher and Lilia Quindoza-Santiago, eds., *Women Empowering Communication*, World Association for Christian Communication/International Women's Tribune Center, Bangkok, 1994

Women's overall share of jobs in the media remains low:

- Under 25 per cent in both broadcasting and the press in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean; 30 per cent for the press and 36 per cent for broadcasting in Europe.

Women rarely occupy top media jobs:

- Out of 200 organizations studied in 30 countries for *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics: 1970-1995*, only seven were found to be headed by women. [16]

Across Asia, the number of women in the media has increased, yet this "has not made a significant change in the content, style or presentation of information. News decisions are still made by men even if news is increasingly reported and edited by women; the employment of women has not radically altered news agendas or priorities." In Asia, "most of the 'soft sections', the weekend supplements, the health, culture and education beats are now almost exclusively run by women; defence, commerce and foreign affairs are still largely male strongholds as are the

editorships of most general and specialized publications", according to a media researcher, Vijayalakshmi Balakrishnan. [17]

By 1990, more than one third of women employed in radio and TV worked in administration, and more than 40 per cent in Zambia, Japan, Chile and all European countries except Greece.

Yet, encouragingly, more young women now want to make a career in the media. In fact, women form the majority of students of mass communication throughout the developed regions, in almost all of Latin America and the Caribbean, and in many parts of Asia and the Pacific.

Female-run alternative media, based outside State or public service broadcasting systems and mainstream commercial production, have witnessed a boom. A 1990 directory, *Third World Women's Publications*, listed over 300 such specialized periodicals. [18] Some other new publications include *Sister* in Namibia; *Speak* in South Africa; *Tamania Mars* in Morocco; and *Asmita* in Nepal.

Women's press services now include DepthNews in Asia, the Women's Feature Service in New Delhi, WINGS (Women's International News Gathering Service) in the US and FEMPRESS in Chile.

The media are also used at the community and local level to develop skills and overcome fears, as with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which teaches women how to use video cameras to record their work and share information with other groups, or the introduction of video and radio among indigenous women in Bolivia and other parts of Latin America, like *Radio Tierra* in Chile and FIRE (Feminist International Radio Endeavour) in Costa Rica. [19]

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

In most of the world, women are becoming increasingly effective leaders of community-based organizations. The success of many such movements depends on the level of activism of women in the community.

Since the early 1980s, NGOs and community-based groups involved in development programmes such as literacy or health campaigns have become more gender-sensitive. They recognize women as primary nurturers and care-givers, health providers, and often responsible for the water, fuel and food needs of communities.

For example, the **Chipko (Hug-the-Trees)** movement in the Himalayas in the 1970s and 1980s was led largely by women. The Uttarkhand hill women were natural leaders of the movement, as they knew best the worth of the forests to their communities.

As leaders of community-based organizations, women usually strive to be democratic, emphasizing teamwork and individual responsibility.

- In Cameroon, the **Women's Networking Association** brings together 50 women's groups, carries out literacy campaigns and provides assistance, such as establishing cooperatives to purchase unsold produce marketed by village women.

- In Kenya, which has 23,000 women's groups, the **Green Belt** movement tackles problems of environmental degradation and poverty, encouraging women to use soil rehabilitation measures and natural fertilizers. With 50,000 women, it has planted 10 million trees and established training centres to increase women's employment opportunities.

- **The Alliance of Costa Rican Women** provides legal and health services to more than 4,000 low-income women. [20]

Women's organizations — grass-roots groups, professional associations, networks and other non-governmental organizations — have demonstrated success in mobilizing women, especially at the community level, in both rural and urban areas. Diverse in form, they help to advance women through advocacy, monitoring of public policies and rallying support.

Besides their local impact and their influence at the national level, community groups play an increasingly important role in international forums. At every major UN conference of this decade, active NGO forums and women's caucuses have led the lobbying efforts to influence the agendas and resulting programmes of action.

OBSTACLES, TRENDS AND GOALS

Since 1990, several changes have affected trends in the sharing of power and decision-making by women at all levels.

- The worldwide movement for democratization has created conditions for greater political participation, but has sometimes led to a decline in the number of women in decision-making positions as a result of the elimination of gender-based quota systems.

- The continuing rise of the global women's movement has sustained pressure on Governments and international organizations to increase women's participation in decision-making.

In many regions and in many fields — industry, media and politics — women still suffer both horizontal segregation (clustering in lower-paying, lower-status, staff and administrative jobs) and vertical segregation (occupying non-strategic areas).

Some believe that as women gain access to all fields, the weight of their numbers will change the conditions and opportunities. This has not always proved true. Lethargy inside organizations and institutional structures, and the influence of socialization and conformism, work to maintain the status quo.

Change requires active policies of equal opportunities, gender equality at every level of organization and the removal of "glass ceilings" that thwart advancement. Invisible barriers of attitudes and biases hinder women's advancement to positions of power and decision-making. Assertiveness training and support groups can help women feel less isolated and alienated, and empower them to make a difference.

Of the many remaining obstacles to women's advancement in decision-making, two stand out:

- Maternity: Working women usually face an either/or situation. Either they sacrifice their jobs and careers to become mothers, or they miss out on motherhood. Most women take on both roles with little support in child-care or flexible working conditions.

Often when qualified, professional women are poised to occupy top decision-making positions, they find their so-called "biological clocks" reminding them of motherhood. Those who choose maternity frequently find themselves taking a back seat in corporate, national or international decision-making bodies.

Motherhood is largely considered a woman's burden and responsibility. In only a few countries is it considered society's responsibility to ensure that women and men both share productive and reproductive roles and responsibilities.

Governments and businesses are beginning to take action aimed at increasing women's participation in high decision-making positions: equal-opportunity programmes and the establishment of quotas; and support services such as day-care centres, crèches and after-school services.

- Inequality in the public arena often reflects the pervasive inequality in the household. With male and female roles firmly entrenched in most societies, women find it difficult to be taken seriously and step out of their traditional roles.

Women are pooling their efforts to influence public policy and rally support for women in political, social and economic decision-making. Only through united efforts can women bring about genuine change.

At the international level, several UN agencies are making a difference.

With UNICEF backing, an increasing number of countries are sensitizing government staff to gender awareness in planning and policy-making. In Kenya, training has been conducted for district-level officials.

In Ecuador, an inter-agency group made up of several UN agencies, including UNDP, UNFPA and WHO, prepared a common gender-training package for project managers, staff and beneficiaries.

Since 1986, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has helped train Honduran women, selected by local women's groups, to be active in rural development and organize their own groups.

UNIFEM offers leadership training to women in various parts of the world:

- A mentoring programme begun by the African Academy of Sciences in Kenya, which provides future female decision makers with leadership, technical, gender and advocacy skills through internships at national, regional and international institutions;

- The creation of a network of women involved in community development in Paraguay, to promote the design and implementation of gender-sensitive public policies;

- Funding the Gender-Watch Group in Thailand, a nationwide network of NGOs, academic institutions and grass-roots female activists that monitors political activities and decision-making in the context of gender and lobbies to include women's concerns in national development plans.

According to Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, "the level of participation of women in decision-making and sharing of power between

men and women is still unacceptably low and calls in question the basic principles of democracy".[21] Unless women can fully participate in political and other decision-making, democracy cannot be achieved or effectively maintained.

Electing women to high office is a crucial role that women everywhere can accomplish. By casting their votes, women can bring about not only political change, but changes in public policy, in the economy and in society at large.

NOTES

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Contains an employment survey, issues of sharing work and family responsibilities, employers' organizations, financing and managing health care, chemicals and the work environment.

World Population Trends and Policies, Special Topics: Fertility and Women's Life Cycle and Socio-economic Differentials in Mortality. United Nations. 1988. 411 pp. Sales No. E.88.XIII.3. ISBN 92-1-151168-2. $47.50.
This report offers a summary of results of the monitoring of population trends and policies in substantive areas such as population growth and structure; fertility; mortality; population and development; global trends in the area of social and economic development; and consequences of population change for social and economic development.

1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. New York. United Nations. 1994. Sales No. E.95.IV.1.
Comprehensive analysis of policy issues and concepts related to the advancement of women. Gender approach to poverty and employment.

The World's Women: Trends and Statistics (1970/1990). United Nations. 1990. 120 pp. Sales No. E.90.XVII.3. ISBN 92-1-161313-2. $19.95.
This unique publication represents a pioneering study of social trends and statistics by gender. It provides data and analyses about how much women contribute to economic, political and family life.

UN Audiovisual Materials Related to Women

Women and Work. ILO/Theopresse. (In production.) 52 min. E/F.
Portraying women around the world who have succeeded in their work despite barriers.

Refugee Women: The Courage to Move Onward. UNHCR. 1994. 13 min. NTSC/PAL/SECAM. E/F/A; a Spanish version to be released in January 1995.

Rights of Passage (Four Stories of Survival). UNICEF/UNIFEM. 1994. 26 min. NTSC. E.
This programme presents the stories of four girls and their coming of age in four different parts of the world.

Women's Right to Health. WHO. 1994. 20 min. NTSC/PAL/SECAM. E.

Street Girls. UNICEF. 1993. 14 min.. NTSC. S.
A view of life in the streets of Nicaragua told through the eyes of two young street girls.

Meena: Count Your Chickens; Meena: Sharing the Mango. UNICEF South Asia with Hanna-Barbera Productions. 1993. NTSC. E/F/S/P/Hindi/Nepali/Urdu/Bengali.
Two videos in the animated Meena series about a spirited young South Asian girl who manages to break gender stereotypes.

Where Women Are Leaders. UNIFEM/Women's Feature Service. 1993. 25 min. NTSC. E.
Women's performing troupe travels around India. Topics: literacy, dowry, social awareness.

Profiles in Progress. UNIFEM/ICS Inc. 1991. 28 min. NTSC. E.
UNIFEM project in Tempoal, Mexico: revolving loan funds/women's regional organizations.

Key to Freedom: Women and Literacy. UNICEF/UNDPI. 1990. 28 min. NTSC. E/F/S.
Projects to advance women's literacy in US, Mali, Thailand and Costa Rica. Presented by Germaine Greer. Topics: literacy and information about health.

Nakusha: The Unwanted Child. UNICEF. 1990. 30 min. NTSC. E/F.
On the importance of the right of girls to education, health and happiness in India.

Effective Public Speaking

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Think of speakers who have impressed you. It's likely that they share certain characteristics: an ability to bring dry facts to life, solid knowledge, commitment and a strong desire to communicate. To help those who write speeches and presentations, ***Notes for Speakers*** assembles in convenient form current information about the UN and selected issues before it. Good factual content is a vital prerequisite for effective public speaking about the UN.

Every topic and audience demands a different approach. On some formal occasions, simply reading a message or a statement may be appropriate. But most general audiences need a sense of interaction with a speaker, and each speaker develops his or her own style and techniques for reaching them. A series of workshops in public speaking for Secretariat officials at UN Headquarters provided practical suggestions for combining content and delivery in public speaking. A few of those suggestions follow.

STRUCTURE

Your speech should have a clear opening, body and closing. The opening should be just two or three minutes long. An opening anecdote, analogy or quote can help crystallize your central message. The body of the speech should consist of brief and well-organized points. Information should be carefully selected to support the central theme and draw on examples, analogies or real-life experiences to animate the topic. Numbers and ratios should be made meaningful by relating them to the experience of the audience. Resist the temptation to say everything you know about a topic. Too much information can be worse than not enough. The body should be 10 to 15 minutes long. The closing should briefly summarize the speech and state its three most important points in one or two minutes.

DELIVERY

Establish real communication with your audience by focusing on them and not "locking" your eyes on your text. Finish each phrase looking at your audience, and look at them to emphasize points or raise questions. Know your topic well enough to depart from the text and extemporize without losing the connection to your main points. Use language that is easily spoken and understood.

Stand with your weight even on both feet. Gestures and facial expressions should be animated and natural, and reinforce main points. Project your voice. An audience that can't hear you can't be interested in what you have to say.

TEXT

It may help to make three versions of your speech: a complete, edited text in paragraph form; a version marked for delivery with underlined words or phrases for emphasis and slashes to separate phrases; and a version that places each phrase on a separate line for ease of reading (a few sample lines of the latter formats follow). Leave wide margins in your text for notes and

reminders. Don't staple your text. Slide each page to the side so you can see both the previous and next page.

SAMPLE LAYOUTS

(Edited version with phrasing marks)

Not long ago/I was at a meeting with a colleague who had a terrible toothache./ And although the meeting was about the suffering of people living in poverty/it made very little impact on him./ The pain he was enduring at that moment was far more relevant/than the plight of strangers thousands of miles away./

People who come from developing countries/tend to think that people in the richer, industrialized countries don't realize how severe their problems are,/ because the rich are too absorbed in their own immediate problems./ Although the UN is not an international financial institution/like the World Bank and IMF,/it has an important role to play in international economic problems./ All voices are heard in its debates — /from the poorest countries to the richest. They remind us that all of our economies are interdependent,/and that the problems we face individually/require us to work together.

(Line-by-line version)

1. NOT LONG AGO
   I WAS AT A MEETING WITH A COLLEAGUE
   WHO HAD A TERRIBLE TOOTHACHE.

2. AND ALTHOUGH THE MEETING WAS ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF PEOPLE
   LIVING IN POVERTY
   IT MADE VERY LITTLE IMPACT ON HIM.

3. THE PAIN HE WAS ENDURING AT THAT MOMENT
   WAS FAR MORE RELEVANT THAN THE PLIGHT OF STRANGERS
   THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY.

4. PEOPLE WHO COME FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
   TEND TO THINK
   THAT PEOPLE IN THE RICHER, INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES
   DON'T REALIZE
   HOW SEVERE THEIR PROBLEMS ARE.

5. BECAUSE THE RICH ARE TOO ABSORBED IN THEIR OWN PROBLEMS.

6. ALTHOUGH THE UN IS NOT AN INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL
   INSTITUTION
   LIKE THE WORLD BANK AND IMF
   IT HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY
   IN THE WORLD'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

7. ALL VOICES ARE HEARD IN ITS DEBATES ...

FROM THE POOREST COUNTRIES
TO THE RICHEST.

8. THEY REMIND US
THAT ALL OF OUR ECONOMIES ARE INTERDEPENDENT ...
AND THAT THE PROBLEMS WE FACE INDIVIDUALLY
REQUIRE US TO WORK TOGETHER.

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